

interzone



DECEMBER 2001

NUMBER 174

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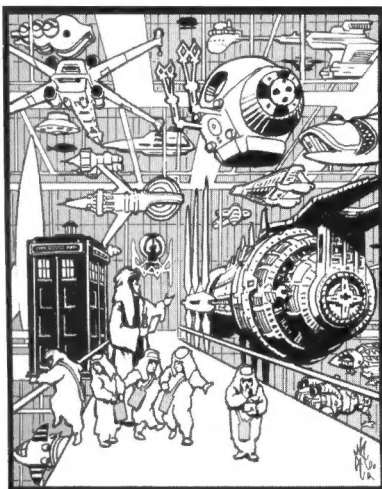
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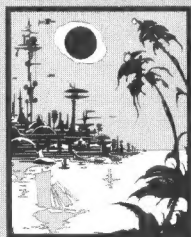
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COMING NEXT MONTH

Season's Greetings and a Happy New Year to all. In hand for the next issue and following months are fine new stories by Michael Swanwick, Brian Stableford, Dominic Green, Andy Robertson, Zoran Zivkovic and many others – plus all our usual features and reviews. Watch out for the January 2002 *Interzone*.



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interzone

science fiction & fantasy

DECEMBER 2001

Number 174

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Cover by Jason Hurst

Published monthly. All material is © *Interzone*, 2001, on behalf of the various contributors

ISSN 0264-3596

Printed by KP Litho Ltd, Brighton

Trade distribution: Diamond Magazine Distribution Ltd.,
Unit 7, Rother Ironworks, Fishmarket Road, Rye,
East Sussex TN31 7LR (tel. 01797 225229).

Bookshop distribution: Central Books,
99 Wallis Rd., London E9 5LN (tel. 020 8986 4854).



James White Award Winner

The 2001 James White Award, established to honour the memory of one of Ireland's best loved science-fiction writers, was presented on 3rd November to David D. Levine for his short story "Nucleon" – published for the first time in this issue of *Interzone*. Levine, a native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, now resident in Portland, Oregon, received a cheque for \$150 and a trophy.

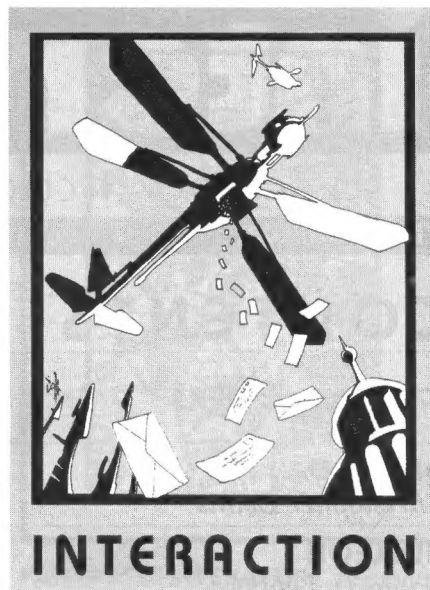
Levine's story was chosen from a field of over 100 entries. The final judging was conducted by a panel drawn from the science-fiction field in the USA and Europe: Michael Carroll, Irish author based in Dublin; Ian McDonald, UK author based in Belfast; Kim Newman, UK author and critic based in London; Mike Resnick, US author; and David Pringle, Editor of *Interzone*.

David Levine lives in Portland with his wife Kate Yule and works in the IT industry. In his spare time, he edits the sf fanzine *Bento*. A longtime sf fan, he has recently enjoyed some success as a writer. A graduate of the famed Clarion Writers Workshop, he was placed second in the Writers of the Future competition in July of 2001. "I am particularly honoured to have won the James White Award," he said. "James has always been one of my favourite writers."

The Award was presented at a ceremony in Queens University, Belfast, by White's daughter Patricia Larkin. White was Honorary President of the University's SF Society for many years, and his granddaughter Sinead is presently a student there. Levine was unable to attend personally, so the award was accepted on his behalf by friend Lynne Ann Morse, who lives in Dublin. The winner did however express his thanks through a recorded video message. He said that it was appropriate that as one who was known for his work in fanzines and who was now moving into fiction writing, he should win an award named in honour of someone who was also a fanzine writer before he became a professional. He encouraged the runners-up to keep writing and to keep submitting their stories to publications.

Speaking at the ceremony, Michael Carroll said that "Nucleon" stood out from the very start and was the unanimous choice of the judging panel. Peggy White, James White's widow, described it as a story that her husband would have loved to read had he been alive.

The James White Award is now accepting entries for the 2002 competition. Full details may be obtained from the Award's website at: <http://www.jameswhiteaward.com>



Dear Editors:

I am a new reader, to *Interzone* and to science fiction, I have to say it is fantastic to be able to read *new* fiction every month. Recently I saw a letter asking for some reprint material; personally I feel that the magazine can do no better than to stick with new work.

On another subject, I stumbled into fantasy first from Frank Frazetta, then Robert E. Howard, Edgar Rice Burroughs and then to your pages. The reason for my love of this genre is not simply an interest in the fantastic; it is an interest in true quality imaginative writing. No other medium encourages the imaginative creativity encompassed in the pages of *Interzone*; to this end I must defend

Richard Calder against a recent letter. True, his sentences are lengthy, but they enrich the story in a way that few others can match.

Lee Daniel Guest

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Dear Editors:

Just a couple of comments on the fiction in issue 172...

Doesn't the ending of Chris Beckett's story "Marcher" bear more than a passing resemblance to that of Larry Niven's 1968 classic, "All the Myriad Ways"? And in Henry Wessells's story, "Hugh O'Neill's Goose," the narrator seems to be able to get around the world much more quickly than could other people in that era – he gets from Ireland to Goa between August and November 1958, and from China to Ireland between December 1599 and May 1600. That's some going in those days!

Malcolm Ostermeyer

Belfast

Spinoff Reality

Dear Editors:

I fear Adrian Fry (*Interzone* 172) has entirely missed the point of Gary Westfahl's brave article whilst reciting "original works good, serial works bad." Spinoff is a vague term that should be dropped. Are Stephen Baxter's *The Time Ships* or Brian Herbert & Kevin J. Anderson's *Dune* books spinoffs? Somehow spinoff doesn't refer to "proper" sf authors and their serial continuations.

Truth be told, spinoff usually refers to what the book trade calls "TV tie-

At the award ceremony for the James White Award 2001 were left to right Michael Carroll, member of the judging panel, Patricia Larkin, daughter of the late James White, Lynne Ann Morse, who accepted the award on behalf of winner David D. Levine, Peggy White, widow of James White and James Bacon, administrator of the award.



ins." These have a bad reputation because early attempts were cash-ins on high-rating television shows by publishing houses who commissioned writers more suited to period adventure and crime potboilers. Recent book series work a lot harder to recruit authors who understand the sf genre and evoke the particular narrative flavour of their source.

Having said this, writing for a media genre series is still a double-edged sword. You gain a well-characterized set of principal characters but loose particular narrative possibilities. First-person narration tends to be (but not always) an early casualty.

What Adrian Fry fails to recognize is the human love of consistent repeatable experience. It seduces us when we don't feel like taking a chance and opt for the known and trusted. Modern experience is typified by the branding of reassuring homogeneity. That's what the cyberpunks understood with all their references to designer labels, real or imagined.

The future is made of taking previously craftsman-made products and mass-producing them. Luckily *Homo sapiens* is also a sucker for the customized and the limited-edition, so there's hope. Myself, I always liked the idea of robots stippling unique fractal patterns into the tarmac and concrete of our cities. Ubiquitous yet also localized.
Allan Toombs
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Last Words on Evelyn Lewes

Dear Editors:

Would you be kind enough to inform Evelyn Lewes that criticism is better aimed if one is working from a knowledge of the subject being discussed. I would never have passed my degree if I had criticized something I disliked without taking the time to read about it and watch it carefully first.

Vikki Green
Northampton

Dear Editors:

I have only recently subscribed to *Interzone*, but already I think that Evelyn Lewes is being given far too hard a time for presenting perfectly reasonable views in a balanced manner.

To begin with, television shows are episodic. Therefore each episode must hold appeal to draw in viewers. Obviously the longer-term fan wants to be drawn into the deeper layers of the mythology of the show, but the occasional, or new, viewer has to be able to draw some kind of entertainment from it. Otherwise how do shows increase ratings beyond those who watch the first episodes? I don't want to have to research a show before sitting down to watch it, just to see if I like it. Yes,

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when you're a hardcore fan you will, but you have to get drawn in first.

Further, in my opinion Ms Lewes's comments are quite correct about *Babylon 5* and its flaws. I gave up trying to watch it long ago. Every episode I've seen was wholly uninteresting. Now I know that many people disagree, but I can't see why. At least Ms Lewes has found some positive aspects!

Criticism is bound to personal taste, no matter how much the critic tries. Ms Lewes makes it clear where her taste lies, which is as much as anyone can do. I think it's good that *Babylon 5* inspires passion amongst its fans, but it's a relief to see someone outlining precisely why I don't like it.

Robin Evans

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Dear Editors:

Having read Evelyn Lewes's column in *Interzone* 172, I conclude that she does not like *Babylon 5*, but does like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I, on the other hand, do like *B5* and do not like *Buffy*. I don't really find "fantasy/horror" type series very entertaining; I prefer my sf to be Science Fiction.

For the record, I have seen a few episodes of *Buffy*, but they have failed to "grab" me. I suppose if I was so inclined I could sit down and watch more episodes of *Buffy* and pick as many holes in the plotting, acting, costumes, etc., as Evelyn has for *Babylon*

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5, but I have no pretensions to be TV critic. I have my personal preferences, Evelyn has hers. I tend to keep mine to myself, perhaps Evelyn would be better off following this example, but having read *Interzone* for quite a number of years I don't think I have read so much heart-felt "Interaction" since the Brian Aldiss story "Horse Meat." So may be Evelyn should continue to offer us her personal views; after all, we don't have to read them. But then again, I might miss reading what she makes of *Cleopatra 2525*.

Jonathan Moffett

Didcot, Oxon.

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Dear Editors:

I was enjoying reading *Interzone* 172. That is, until I reached the media commentary by Evelyn Lewes. Ms Lewes' opening paragraphs were less about *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* than self-justification for her research methods. She also seems to be of the opinion that BBC 2's transmission format is far more important than its appalling treatment of mid-evening cult programmes, since she fails to mention the channel's incessant chop-and-change scheduling at all. As for "spoilers," isn't she capable of reviewing an episode on sky and whetting a terrestrial viewer's appetite without giving away the plot? Apparently not, since she then goes on to reveal a major spoiler for *Dark Angel* which has not yet aired on British terrestrial TV.

Once finished with *Buffy* and *Dark Angel* the remainder, and largest part, of her column is dedicated to yet another diatribe against *Babylon 5*. When will Ms Lewes understand that aficionados of *B5* don't give a kipper's privates about her ill-informed, ad nauseam opinions? Who cares that the science behind *B5* is a bit dodgy? The point of *B5*'s existence is not to educate but to *entertain*!

Maybe you should employ *Buffy* to drive this particular point home, since it might be the only language Ms Lewes understands. How can she be objective about *B5* when she is predisposed to self-opinionated destructive criticism rather than exploring why millions of people enjoy it? If watching *B5* is so painful to her sensibilities why bother? And why go to the trouble of criticizing a series that ended years ago? Isn't there enough current TV sf around for her to maul?

I like criticism to be full of wit and humour even if I don't agree with what is being said. To date Ms Lewes has failed to display either of these virtues, preferring the harridan approach. She may be in danger of becoming the Glenda Slagg of sf journalism. I shall be watching her space very carefully.

Lynne Lancaster

weird.visions@cybermail.uk.com

DA CAPO

Christopher Evans

Question: What do you give the man who has everything?

Answer: More of the same.

Did you know that the over-60s now make up two-thirds of the population of the Western world? You probably did. You're probably one of them. Which made Julianne and me two of an increasingly rare commodity: young, and gifted with it. We were in our prime.

I'm writing these words with a pencil I stole from an antique bureau on scraps of paper that I scavenge wherever I find them. I don't know who I'm writing them for, maybe just myself. Of course I have free access to all the terminals around the place, but paper is safer. You can hide it away, unlike anything electronic, though I'm sure my room is searched regularly and that every word of this account will probably be read by prying eyes. No matter. Paper is physical; it seems more authentic somehow.

Authentic. Now there's a word to conjure with.

It was exactly two weeks since Julianne had left when I got the call. I'd put a Mute and Store on incoming messages but the phone starting ringing anyway and the screen lit up.

It was the Gnome, as Julianne and I had christened her, looking characteristically gnomish in both senses of the word. Her office had priority access on all my systems, which meant they could override them whenever they pleased.

The Gnome appeared to be frowning, though her pinpoint eyes were always shadowed under a brow that jutted like a cranial massif from her sparse infantile hairline.

"Good morning, Marcus," she said.

"Is it?" I had been sleeping badly and she'd woken me from a thick-headed doze. I squinted at the window but it was in motion-picture mode, purple cows munching ochre grass under a bilious sky, like a lurid commercial for a children's dessert. One of my little rebellions against the default mode.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you."

"Feel free."

"You look wasted."

"All-night binge. You should have seen the other guy."

She didn't dignify this with a reaction.

"So how are you?" she asked in a manner which suggested that she knew already. "How's the latest commission coming along?"

"I'm taking a break from work," I told her. "I'm knitting myself a pair of bed socks for the winter."

Humour – though admittedly this was scarcely a shining example – was always lost on her. She did something with her mouth that made her cheeks collapse for an instant.

I did my best not to look revolted.

"Any news of Julianne?" I asked quite shamelessly.

She shook her head; or I should say it slewed about on her neck. "I rather think we won't be seeing any more of her."

"We'll see about that," I retorted in a tone that would have done credit to a thwarted adolescent. Her presumption and dismissiveness outraged me. J and I had worked for Cole Corps for over three years, and both of us were among its top-paid repo-men.

"If she doesn't surface within the month, her contract will be terminated."

"Do you think she'll care about that?"

"I don't know, Marcus. Do you?"

She gave me a parody of a superior smile, her flaccid lips tightening across teeth that were too large and numerous for her mouth. I'd always theorized that she was a designer baby and that something had gone badly wrong during gestation; but even I wasn't crass enough to ask her direct.

"Cole insists on absolute loyalty and reliability from his associates," she told me. "It's as simple as that."

"Associates? That's a hoot! We're more like indentured labour."

"We can release you from your contract any time you wish."

Which wasn't what I wanted, as she knew perfectly well.

I'd always enjoyed my work and relished my talent for it.

There was a brief hiatus in which she sat more upright so that I could see her webbed fingers drumming on the gleaming blonde wood of her console desk. J and I reckoned that she was in her early 40s, about twice our age, though she looked perfectly decrepit to a casual glance. She was back-dropped by a big curving window that showed a low contour of reedy dunes and the gunmetal Pacific beyond.

"To business," she said, shuffling some hard copy in front of her, not looking up at me. "You'll be gratified to hear that Cole was very impressed with your latest effort –"

"Which one was that?"

She made a show of checking through the hard copy, still not looking up. "I have it as HDN-2."

"Sounds like a virus. Give me a clue."

This was a little game we played. She always discussed my work as *projects* or *output* and invariably referred to them by their reference codes. Just as invariably I made her give the actual title and sometimes even the artists.

A further rustling of the papers and the hint of a tolerant sigh. "That would be the Beatles motion picture follow-on to *A Hard Day's Night*."

"Now called? Refresh my memory?"

"*A Hard Night's Day Too*."

"Brilliant!" I said with as much sarcasm as I could muster. "John Lennon would have been ecstatic."

The revised title was a corporate decision; I'd pushed for *Done in Daze* for both the album and the movie, which at least had the virtue of a certain punning ambiguity even if it probably was more 1967 than 1964.

A prolonged stare from the Gnome. "No doubt it's the prerogative of the artist to be boorish and tiresome, but I have neither the time nor the inclination to indulge you. Let me merely say that Cole expressly requested me to inform you that he considers the track 'That Girl's Gotta Hold on You' to be the best and most contemporary song on the album."

"I'm absolutely thrilled." Truth is, I *was*.

"Furthermore, he also considers the accompanying cinematic footage that supports the song to be equally poignant and perfect in its capturing of the *zeitgeist*."

It sounded as though she was reading this from a script. But I was pleased for Julianne even so.

"In that respect it's doubly regrettable that the originator has absented herself from our employ –"

"Speak English, for Christ's sake! It's my lover you're talking about!"

"Your ex-lover, Marcus."

She had the temerity to lick her lips at that point. Had she been in the room, I might have punched her.

"Which is unfortunate in more than one sense. Cole was ready to authorize a 25 per cent salary increase in acknowledgement of your efforts. Needless to say, you will receive yours. The other will remain pending, subject to her unlikely return."

I was boiling, but I maintained a veneer of composure because I was practised at it. I had tried hard not to let the Gnome's grotesque appearance influence my feelings towards her, but her personality, which combined a pruri-

ent yet impersonal interest in our affairs with a brusque authoritarianism, was just as repulsive.

"There's one thing more," the Gnome was continuing. "Cole would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet you."

"What?"

"A personal audience, Marcus. In the flesh. He grants those very rarely these days. Cole is minded to ask if this would be convenient."

Minded to ask. As if there was any other option. It was like a summons from royalty.

"When?"

"Within the week. Our office will arrange all transport. I'll notify you in due course. Have a good day, Marcus."

"All my friends call me Marc. But you can call me Cus."

She blanked the screen.

I'd been working for Cole Corps since I was headhunted by one of their scouts during my final year at the Euro Music Academy in Canary Wharf. Apart from the usual compositional work, I'd been doing a module on popular music in the second half of the 20th century.

Cole Corps was a multinational organization with interests in biotechnology and the media; but its core business was entertainment, especially music. Cole himself (no one knew whether it was a first name, surname or neither) was a centurion who'd been in his prime around the 20 years from the early 1960s. His hobby was the collection of material, particularly music and movies, from that era. New material, that is. Singles and albums and movies and books and so on by the artists of the day, all especially created for him by a disparate group of young composers whom he called his repo-men.

Julianne always used to say it was short for "reproduction menials."

Which was where I came in. They gave me a whole series of tests – some cognitive, some talent mapping – before I was invited to join the corporation as a composer of music.

The terms were generous and impressive. Each commission would originate directly from Cole himself. Although I would be just one of a geographically diverse group often working on the same project, I wouldn't have to leave London or collaborate with any other composer if I preferred to work alone. (These concessions were designed to address my dislike of travel and my poor record as a team player.) I would be free to pursue my own musical interests whenever the corporation did not require me.

The salary they offered was quite staggering to me at the time. In addition I would be provided with spacious accommodation and all the technical facilities I required. Would a four-bedroom house in St John's Wood with a recording studio suffice? I found the car of my choice also waiting for me in the driveway on the day I moved in.

The studio was equipped with state-of-the-art equipment that allowed all the sampling, morphing and synthesizing that any repo-man could need, but it took me a while to find my touch. My first commission, a 1977 Talking Heads track, was thrown out solely on the basis

of its title, "Eat the Document," which I'd taken from a Pennebaker documentary of Bob Dylan's European tour a decade previously. Then I had a Small Faces single from their "Lazy Sunday Afternoon" period rejected when I boxed too clever and did a straight 1960s adaptation of Blur's "Parklife."

Both tracks lacked *authenticity*, I was told. It was a word I was to hear repeatedly. This wasn't about playing fast and loose with the existing musical canon or doing anything obviously self-referential. No, it needed to sound authentic in every way but actuality. We were expanding a portion of history sideways, making it seem as if there had been 24 months in every year, creating virtual space to be filled up with more of the cultural efflorescence of the times.

There was plenty of this kind of guff, but I got the gist of it. Cole wanted nothing that smelt remotely of pastiche or imitation. He wanted the *new* music that was credibly of its particular time.

So I immersed myself in the last four decades of the 20th century as fully as I could. I downloaded books, magazines and newspapers. I watched movies, TV shows and newsreel footage. I went walkabout in the chain stores and boutiques and clubs of that era, courtesy of the corporation's sites specifically devoted to that purpose. I talked to the avatars I encountered there, getting a sense of the accents and cadences and phraseology and preoccupations in each decade. I did *Swinging London*, *West Coast Flower Power*, watched live shows by everyone from the Righteous Brothers to the Ramones. I went to Paris and Berlin and Kent State for a more acute political dimension.

This wasn't as much of a chore as it might seem, even for a person of my generation. My father had inherited a collection of vinyl and cassettes from *his* father and he used to play them endlessly when I was a child. We'd had little else to occupy ourselves during the long winter evenings on the Neptune barrage complex in the North Sea, where he was the operations manager for Ocean-Power. I'd grown up with the music and had an affinity for it. Composition in that style came more naturally to me than any desire to create my own music. I was no fettered creative spirit, prostituting my talents for financial gain: the arrangement suited me perfectly.

Eventually I came up with a couple of Tom Verlaine songs that were used on the 1976 *Little Johnny Jewel* album. This was swiftly followed by a P.P. Arnold track in the vein of "The First Cut is the Deepest" that I created just for the hell of it. I didn't submit it direct, but it was picked up by the Gnome during one of her regular trawls of my site. Apparently Cole was deeply impressed both by my initiative and by the results. Suddenly I was fully on board.

I won't bore you with the details of the rest of my output; there's nothing more tiresome than a recital of another person's musical enthusiasms, even someone as intriguing as Cole. But from then on the commissions came more frequently and I showed a surer touch in hitting the right notes.

Sometime later that day I was woken by a pounding on the front door. A male voice was cheerily shouting: "Open

up, you antisocial bastard! I know you're in there."

I half stumbled through three sets of doors, bleeping open locks as I went.

Guy was standing in the porch, blonde and bronzed, dressed as usual in white. He grinned at me. "So there you are. After a fashion."

I blinked against the low-lying sun that was slanting through the trees.

"What time is it?"

"Time you were up and about, you cur. Get your glad rags on. I've come to take you away from all this."

He ushered me inside and up the stairs to my bedroom, telling me that he'd been ringing for days and days and that since I wouldn't answer he'd decided to come around for himself and turf me out of hiding.

I sat on the bed while he rummaged through my wardrobe, removing clothes and flinging selected items at me.

"We're going out on the town tonight," he told me. "Marchant's orders."

My head was still thick with sleeping pills, but I didn't raise any protest. I'd spent the immediate aftermath of my conversation with the Gnome in a state of exhilaration, anxiety and despair. Exhilaration because I was eager to meet Cole, anxiety because I didn't know what to expect beyond the dreaded flight, and despair because I knew that Julianne should have been accompanying me. Instead she'd opted to walk out of our life with no warning and no meaningful explanation.

I told Guy I was going to take a shower before I got dressed.

"Leave the door open," he said.

"Why?"

"Don't want you playing with yourself in there."

The water revived me pretty quickly. I wondered if the Gnome had sent Guy around. He was an Australian who'd helped recruit me to Cole Corps after a visit to the Academy. I considered him a friend as well as a fellow repo-man, but it was possible that the corporation had sent him around to check up on me. Maybe they were worried I might be suicidal. I didn't think so myself. But then you never knew.

I checked the console messages before we left. My PI had called in, with the usual news. There was still no trace of Julianne.

We took my car into town. It was a Porsche Automatic. I'd never learned to drive myself, but when I'd acquired it I'd also been given the services of the beautiful and capable Lilith, a woman three years my senior who'd been happy to act as my chauffeuse as well as housekeeper and resident lover. But when Julianne had moved in I was happy to relinquish her and let the car do the driving itself, though I always sat in the driver's seat and twiddled the wheel from time to time for effect.

As the car moved off down the driveway, Guy reached across me and punched a number into the destination code.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Magical mystery tour. Wait and see. Did you brush your teeth?"

I grimaced at him.

"And you've had a shave. Good boy."

I could tell from the area code that our destination was somewhere in the West End. I wanted to tell Guy about my forthcoming meeting with Cole but instead I said, "Any word of Julianne?"

He shook his head. "Nothing. Sorry, mate. She's well and truly gone to ground."

He was the person I'd blubbered to down the phone when I'd found her note. J and I had often gone out together as a foursome with whichever girl Guy was dating at the time. I wondered if he actually knew where she was but had been sworn to secrecy. No. I wasn't even going to entertain the idea. Down that line of thinking lay paranoia, and I didn't want to make the trip.

Not long afterwards the Porsche pulled into the underground car park of the strawberry-and-cream Mates Incorporated tower near Marble Arch. I began to protest to Guy that I wasn't in the mood for companionship, and certainly not of the variety he doubtless intended.

"Just come in and have a look," he insisted, wrenching me out of the car. "They've got a few new lines in since you were here last."

A glass-bodied elevator whisked us up through the central atrium of the store. The ground floor held the PlayMates section, where parents and children could fuss over pink candyfloss poodles and their favourite life-sized cartoon characters in Disney landscapes of pastel fairytale castles and confectionery trees. The creatures were bio-engineered clones with electronic brains, and custom models could be ordered. But the market had shrunk in recent years: fertility was declining and most couples put off having children until they were in late middle age.

Beyond this was the WorkMates floor, where drones could be rented or purchased to carry out any task from bricklaying to bee keeping. Humanoid models were obtainable but there was a fashion for servo-organisms specifically designed for their tasks. Guy and I couldn't resist scoffing at the display cases with their wide-mouthed gardener dogs that could trim lawns and prune roses, and the multi-limbed household cleaners that looked like primrose octopuses absurdly perched on oversized gyroscopes. The younger generation disdained such accoutrements, preferring to do routine chores ourselves or pay premium rates for the rental of real human beings. For those of us who worked for Cole Corps such services were in any case provided gratis: Mates Inc was a subsidiary of the corporation.

We passed onwards, up through SoulMates, where the clientele was positively geriatric, though most of them looked pretty dapper in that brisk straight-backed manner characteristic of desenescence treatment. Here you could acquire the live-in companion of your choice to replace a departed loved one. They could be physically identical to them, though of limited intellectual and social skills. According to Guy the pet section was more extensive than the human one.

Finally the elevator stopped on the topmost floor. I'd been here once before with Guy. This was IntiMates, where you could hire or purchase a partner to meet your sexual needs. Under the silver sheen of the privacy-screened display cases were models of every physiolog-

ical variety and sexual predisposition. Guy, ever the satyr, couldn't resist de-silvering one of the screens to show me a typically "boosted" female clone with the dark skin and expansive contours that he tended to favour.

"Latest model," he told me with a gleeful grin. "She has an extra clitoral implant. Guess where?"

My gaze strayed to the companion's face, and in particular her eyes, in which the pupils were hugely dilated in a manner suggestive of permanent sexual arousal. But their blackness was empty, soulless, devoid of any hint of self-volition.

Though Guy seldom lacked a real lover, he was a regular patron of IntiMates. Once, when Lilith was away on vacation, he'd persuaded me to rent out a companion for the evening. In fact I'd hired out three, just for the hell of it. The models had been specifically grown to be ideal from an erotic point of view, though their brains were rudimentary because neural tissue never developed properly from culture, even if the law had allowed it. Electronic cerebral circuits allowed them to respond to simple suggestions and even make appropriate noises in addition to their limited vocabulary of sentences and phrases; but they had no initiative whatsoever. Attempting to cavort with them, I'd felt as if I was engaged in a cross between masturbation and necrophilia. Finally I called the delivery service and made them come and take the companions away. Naturally all three went like lambs.

I was far happier with Lilith. Although she was offering a contractual service under what we both knew was an assumed name, she at least had a sense of fun and adventure and I believe she truly enjoyed her work. I once asked her if she'd been assigned from a special agency or catalogue that the corporation maintained. She'd shaken her head, looked amused rather than offended, and said: "I'm a Deluxe edition. A one-off special offer to welcome you on board."

"Listen," I said to Guy, "I'm not really in the mood for this."

"Bear with me," he replied, then led me on to a pair of leather-clad doors discreetly positioned in an alcove. A beefy-looking security man stood on duty in front of them. Guy flashed him his Cole Corps Triple Platinum card. He bleeped the doors open for us.

We ascended a carpeted stairway and went through a red velvet foyer into a small dimly lit showroom. A female sales assistant materialized out of the shadows. She was an attractive Asiatic and wore her scarlet and cream uniform as if it had been expressly designed for her.

"Good evening, Mr Marchant," she said. And then to me: "Good evening, Mr Jones."

I didn't know her, of course; but the staff here were paid to know *us*.

"If it's all right with you," Guy said to her, "I'd like to show him around myself."

"Why, of course." She retreated back into the shadows as effortlessly as she had come.

The showroom was lined with short rows of display cases; one side devoted to males, the other to females. The cases, not privacy screened, showed holograms of men and women who were minimally clothed rather than

naked, although little was left to the imagination. They were arranged in columns according to age, ethnicity, height, body mass and IQ range.

The choice seemed far less extensive than in the main showroom, but there was also something different about the figures themselves. The holograms had nothing of the exaggerated sexual attributes and moronic lustful stares of the models.

"These are real people," I said to Guy.

He nodded eagerly, stopping in front of a display in the high IQ range that showed a slimmer type of woman than he usually favoured. Her skimpy swimsuit and thin-framed spectacles gave her the air of a particularly sexy executive seeking a partner for a no-holds-barred exotic holiday.

Guy indicated a screen set into the base of the display on which personal details were posted.

"This is Martina," he read. "She's 24, Kiev-based, has a doctorate in psychology. She enjoys scuba diving, horse riding and furtive sex in public places." He glanced at me. "Or would you prefer someone a little less outdoors?" He tapped something into the keyboard below the screen. Martina's image vanished and was replaced by that of a blonde Nordic-looking type, her tanned skin wreathed in a flimsy black scarf.

"Ah," he said approvingly. "A compatriot. Michelle. Out of Sydney, NSW. An agrochemist. Double-jointed, according to this. Any position can do." He laughed. "Now that's what I call class."

"Guy," I said, "what's all this about?"

He was grinning. "It's about being able to have any one of these people here. Only not have them in the way you're thinking. You can actually *be* them for a while."

Maybe I was being slow-witted because I didn't know what he was talking about.

"Ever heard of *imprinting*?"

I shook my head.

"I'm not surprised. It's the latest thing. A means of plugging your consciousness temporarily into another person's body. For a few hours you can actually *be* them, experience life through their bodies. While they sleep, you send your mind into their heads."

My scepticism must have shown because he said, "I swear to God it's possible. All you do is sit in a chair and put a helmet on. Special implants give you an electronic link to your host, and a shot of pharmaceuticals lets you drift blissfully away. Then bingo! You wake up inside someone else's head. With temporary ownership of their body. To do with as you want, short of criminal damage."

"It's important to stress that this is a consensual process," said another voice. "The process cannot work without the will of both the donor and host. I'm Cerise, by the way."

It was the sales assistant, who'd appeared again from the shadows and was now gently leading me by the elbow to a side area of the showroom where a series of booths held chairs with small overhanging domes. They bore a banal resemblance to the hairdressing equipment in 20th-century salons.

"This is a joke, yes?" I said.

"It's no joke, Mr Jones," Cerise told me calmly. "The technique *is* quite a new one, not yet fully in the public domain. However it has been rigorously tested and has full health and safety certification. Naturally we were keen to make it available as a premium service to privileged members of the corporation."

"Cole Corps developed it?"

"Who else?" said Guy, still brimming with eagerness. "Fancy a go? You can take a trip for anything from a couple of hours to a whole day."

"You've tried it?"

"Not yet. I thought we could do a double act. Hell, we could even pick a male female pair in the same location and screw one another brainless!" He laughed. "Only joking, mate. Even I've got my limits. But sex or sexual orientation's no bar – you're in control. Anyone in the catalogue here's available for rental."

"Subject to current availability," Cerise added, leading us back to the displays. "Naturally we also provide an appointments service for persons not immediately available on-line. Your host would present themselves to their local reception centre at the agreed time."

From somewhere deep inside me, scruples I'd never known I possessed were crawling to the surface and blinking in the daylight.

"And what do they get out of it?" I asked. "The *hosts*?"

"For most the benefits are purely financial. Obviously such a service doesn't come cheap, though of course it's well within the compass of high-salaried earners such as yourself. There may be other reasons which we would not be at liberty to reveal without the express permission of our client."

She stopped at the display that still showed the Australian woman and tapped a few keys to restore the image of the Ukrainian.

"For example," she said, "I *am* able to tell you that Martina signed up to fund an expensive medical procedure she requires."

"A new pair of eyes?" guessed Guy.

Cerise gave a brief smug smile that told him he was correct without actually admitting as much. "In many parts of the world even the highly qualified are not as financially well rewarded as one might imagine. The service provides a valuable boost to their incomes at minimal inconvenience."

"What happens to them?" I asked, "while they're *hosting* someone else?"

"They're simply unconscious," she replied. "In deep dreamless sleep. Imprinting involves temporarily laying the higher level mental functions of the donor on the cortex of the host."

Donor. As if we were somehow doing them a service.

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards?"

"After the trip. After you've had your time in someone else."

"You simply wake up in your own body with a full memory of your visit. It would be a rather futile exercise if you retained nothing of the experience, wouldn't you agree?"

A bright smile. I didn't return it.

"And the host? What do they remember?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. All that's changed is that they've spent a period of time unconscious. And of course their credit balances are considerably healthier."

She couldn't have been more upbeat and matter-of-fact. I glanced at Guy.

"Well," he said avidly. "How about it? Can you think of a better way of really losing yourself?"

"I'm getting the hell out of here," I told him.

Guy was disappointed but he wasn't one to brood. We took the car to the Soho and spent the rest of the evening in one of the clubs that Julianne and I had always frequented. I kept glancing around, hoping she might walk in at some point, though I knew the chances were remote. I'd done the rounds of all our favourite places in the immediate aftermath of her departure, but no one had seen her.

Guy suggested some pharmaceuticals to raise our spirits but I demurred. I'd never much liked drugs apart from tranquillizers and sleeping pills. I think I've always been afraid they might permanently alter my brain chemistry and screw up my creativity. Instead we stuck to good old-fashioned alcohol.

"Listen," I said to Guy after we'd downed a few, "I'm sorry I spoiled your fun."

"It's OK," he replied without resentment. "It was your party."

"It's just all that imprinting stuff. Gave me the creeps."

"Don't worry about it."

I wasn't sure whether my objections were moral (usually I take the view that anything goes as long as all parties agree) or based on a sense of puppy-dog loyalty to Julianne. Just as possibly I was simply too scared to take the plunge. I'm not especially bold.

Avoiding such heavy-duty considerations, Guy and I instead talked about our work. He had started with Cole Corps as a lyricist but had later graduated to out-and-out prose. He'd recently finished a couple of Kerouac short stories and a novel by Tom Wolfe from his *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* period.

"You know what they want next?" he said to me over a shot of single malt. "A Pirsig. Another fucking *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*."

I laughed. "I thought you liked the challenge."

"I do if I can get my head around the actual concept. I tell you, this one may be a little *too* challenging for my feeble brain."

"You'll be fine." Guy was more of a heavyweight than he admitted. "How long have they given you?"

"Best part of a year, so I suppose I could consider it a stay of execution. What about you, if that's not a stupid question?"

"I'm still on hold," I told him.

He swirled his drink around in his glass, looking into it like someone trying to read tea leaves.

"I'll be 35 next spring," he announced.

This was a bit of a shocker, I had to admit. He'd always claimed he was only three years older than I was. I scrutinized his face, looking for evidence of ageing. There was none.

"You look 25," I assured him.

"Sometimes I feel fucking ancient. This is a young man's game, Marc. Make the most of it while you can."

"Is that a warning?"

"It's advice. Start to lose your edge and they'll put you out to grass without even a 'Thanks for the Memories'."

There was a rare moment of reflective silence between us. On one of the TV screens above us an ancient band of musicians were playing yet another memorial concert in a weatherdomed stadium to an audience of centurions.

"She was happy right up to the moment she left," I said.

It was a statement but also a query. Guy nodded sagely.

"Do you think she just got bored?" I asked.

"No," Guy said emphatically. "Believe me, she loved being with you."

"Then why? Why would she just up and go?"

Guy looked helpless to provide a reason. He said, "You never can tell, mate. I had an aunt back in Townsville who had everything going for her. She was wealthy, successful, had a loving husband and three nice kids. One day she launched herself off the bonnet of her car from the top of a multi-storey car park. Did a head-dive onto the tarmac. No explanation. Nothing."

He'd forgotten that he'd already told me the story. And the woman had actually been his mother: I'd checked it out. Morbid curiosity, I suppose. Guy had been ten years old at the time.

"At least Jules left you a note," he was saying.

"It didn't tell me anything."

"Well, it was something."

"You swear you haven't seen her?"

"I swear."

"She didn't give you any hint she was going to leave?"

He shook his head. "Like I said, you never know what's really going on in other people's minds."

We'd had this conversation before, of course. The thing that bothered me was that Guy never made eye contact when issuing his denials.

Julianne.

I met her at a Cole Corps seminar in Brighton that I'd reluctantly attended as a show of good faith after my first couple of abortive commissions. J had only just been recruited to the organization. She was a moviemaker who'd done an award-winning documentary on flower power for one of the satellite networks.

We happened to walk into an elevator at the same time. She was a good four inches shorter than me, but lean and lithe and black-haired like myself. We smiled at one another and stood behind a straight-backed executive type in a shiny suit and gleaming shoes. As we rode upwards the unmistakable smell of a fart filled the air. I looked at Julianne and she mouthed, "Is that you?" with a humorously outraged expression. I shook my head and plaintively crossed my heart. She put her hands to the throat and made gagging motions. Both of us had to control our sniggers as we pointed at the suited man's backside and screwed up our noses like adolescents.

That was how it began – with an instant, easy famil-

ilarity, as if we'd known one another for years. We sat in the bar drinking until two in the morning with Guy and a graphics artist that he was seeing at the time. Then we went to bed. We stayed awake all night until my drunkenness had abated sufficiently for us to make love while everyone else was getting up for breakfast.

We became more or less inseparable for the rest of the seminar, sneaking off to one another's rooms at every available opportunity. We skipped presentations and pep talks for a quick one or got out of the hotel altogether to walk the shingle and find out more about one another. She told me off for mocking the wrinklies who'd flocked to the beach one hot afternoon. In an era of population decline and widespread joblessness we were fortunate to be part of an elite that had both youth and opportunity on our side. One day we, too, would be old.

It turned out that J's birthday was just two weeks after mine and that she'd had a similar upbringing in the sense of having been an only child with rather staid parents who had nothing of her own creativity. As we walked and talked and made love I started having the kind of feelings that made me think that perhaps this, at least, was the real thing. I'd had plenty of sexual partners, and Lilith was a hard act to beat on a purely erotic basis. But Lilith had no emotional hinterland; she was always, ultimately, businesslike. J had an appetite for life that combined a love of meeting new people with an impish mockery of anything pompous. She had hinterland by the hectare.

On the final night, an odd thing happened. J and I were in the bar along with Guy and his partner. I'd gone off to the gents, and when I emerged the Gnome was standing outside in the corridor, waiting for me.

We'd all had dealings with her, of course. As Cole's chief PA, she was the one who usually called us to give us the latest brief. Cole was pretty much a recluse and rarely had direct contact with his employees.

In the flesh she looked even more warped and twisted than on screen, her limbs too long and bent at all the wrong angles, her back arched over an ivory walking stick. She wore a baggy olive gown that made me want to ask if she was going to a fancy dress party as a frog.

"Mr Jones," she said. "How nice to see you."

I was a little at a loss because naturally I didn't reciprocate.

"A word to the wise," she said without preamble. "Cole Corps is a very enlightened organization and we are always keen to encourage creative fraternization between our operatives. However, we are equally keen to nurture their talents without too much in the way of romantic entanglements."

I blinked at her. "What?"

"Both you and Ms Sanderson are relatively new to your positions. We would not wish a mutual infatuation to distract you from your work."

Her nostrils appeared to be palpitating like some amphibian expression of her disapproval. I laughed, even though amusement was the last thing I felt.

"You can fuck right off," I told her, and walked away.

It turned out that J had had a similar warning earlier that day, though it had been couched so discreetly she

hadn't actually taken it seriously. Not so Guy and his partner. Nothing had been said to either of them.

As far as J and I were concerned, that settled it. She moved in with me the day after the seminar ended.

Of course the Gnome never directly referred to it again, even though it was plain she disapproved. Somehow she managed to convey the impression that she was ostentatiously *not* mentioning it to Cole and thus preserving our positions by her own good offices. Which only made us despise her more.

And the fact was that J and I were brilliant for one another creatively as well as emotionally. We had a mutual interest in one another's work, and J triumphantly came of age with a 30-minute documentary of Elvis's 1961 Albert Hall concert at the same time that I completed an Elektra album for a "concept band" called Vampire Salad that Cole had invented. The brief had been for a marriage of Captain Beefheart and Janis Joplin in the style of 1968. I still regard it as one of my finest achievements. When the Beatles' movie came up there was no question that we would collaborate directly on the segment allotted for us. The very nature of the commission made it impossible to do otherwise. The Gnome, and through her Cole, must have finally realized that J and I enhanced rather than suppressed one another's creativity.

Then J vanished.

I'd gone out that day to visit my parents. They were living in one of the big luxury condominiums outside Swindon. I took the train for the novelty value and had them pick me up at the station.

It was two years since I'd last seen them, though we called one another every couple of months. Both were now in their 60s but looking pretty good on it, straight-backed and bright-eyed, hale in that taut brown-skinned desenescent way. We shook hands on meeting. They had a new car, a Bentley Classic with a fur polka-dot back seat you could stretch out flat in.

The condo was on a low hill, with view down on the ever-expanding city. In their retirement both were heavily into gardening, their beds and borders stocked with marijuana roses and sculpture shrubs in the shapes of small furry animals. That was what we walked about for the first half-hour: the garden. I'd come to tell them about my latest triumphs and about J, whom they'd never met. I'd come to tell them that I intended to marry her – something I hadn't actually discussed with J herself and which only came to me as the train swept through Didcot.

They were polite. They always were. They were interested, in the manner of a teacher visited by a favoured student from the past: courteous, attentive, encouraging, yet somehow at the bottom of it, detached, disinterested. It had always been like this. I'd gone through a phase in early adolescence when I believed that they were secretly solid holograms or sophisticated household drones of the type that were just appearing on the market. In the end I'd put it down to a particularly highly developed species of English Reserve.

Naturally they gave their blessing to my putative marriage, both stressing how pleased they would be to meet

J. It wasn't the sort of hugs'n'kisses occasion I might have liked, but then I hadn't expected it to be. The only sign of any real emotion came when I was boarding the train and my mother came to the carriage door like something out of *Brief Encounter* and told me to look after myself. There were tears in her eyes. The first time I'd ever seen them.

When I got back, J was gone.

I let myself into the house, already steeling myself for the big emotional moment of *The Proposal*. I had no idea whether she would accept but in some ways that didn't matter. It would be a declaration of the intensity of my feelings either way.

The house was empty. Her studio, which we'd installed on the top floor, had been dusted and tidied. All the equipment was switched off, the banks of screens merely reflecting my increasingly bemused face.

I found the note on the bedside table. It said:

Marc, I'm sorry. I had to leave. Please forgive me. J.

The words had been scrawled in green rollerball on the back of a blank postcard. I had the handwriting analyzed to see whether it might have been done under duress. Apparently there was no evidence of that, though it did show all the hallmarks of having been written while in a "fraught state." To me, this was scant consolation for the absence of any endearments.

There was no sign of any forced entry, no sign of a struggle. The security cameras recorded no visitors that day. They showed only Julianne walking down the gravel driveway with a single suitcase of her clothing. She didn't look back.

Two days after my conversation with the Gnome, I got the call. It came not from the Gnome herself but from another minion who informed me that my flight from Heathrow to LA International would depart at 10 am the following morning. Transport would be provided to and from both terminals.

I took a sleeping pill that night but still woke early. The clock showed 6.30. I checked my screen messages, out of habit rather than expectation. There was one from my PI. It consisted of a single line. An address.

I checked it out. It was a place in Dalston that was, according to the database, on the ground floor of an unoccupied block of flats. Within ten minutes I was in the Porsche, driving there.

I grew increasingly agitated as the route-map cursor on the dashboard screen began blinking faster and faster as we closed on our destination. Only when the car finally pulled up did I de-silver the windows and peer out. My heart was racing.

We were in some godforsaken side street that was a mixture of factory outlets and low-rise Brutalist tenements from the halcyon days of the 1960s. Rain was falling, staining the concrete verandahs and stairways, puddling in the potholes and the sunken wells of blocked drains. All the buildings had been vandalized so that the place looked like the aftermath of a war zone.

Thankfully, the street was deserted. My boots crunched on waste and rubble as I walked up to the main entrance. The glass panels of the front doors had been shattered and

crudely repaired with rectangles of chipboard that were rotting and green with algae. The doors weren't locked. When I stepped into the derelict foyer I was assailed with the stench of stale urine and fetid upholstery.

Along a short corridor was a flaking mustard-painted door with an intercom that actually buzzed when I pressed it. My mouth had gone dry and my hands were shaking as I stood there waiting.

"Yeah?" came a male voice, aggressively off-hand.

I swallowed, said, "I'm here to see Julianne."

A ten-second pause, then the same voice said, "Who is this?"

"Guy. Guy Marchant."

A much longer wait. I hadn't had the wit to attempt an Australian accent, but then the intercom was scarcely up to such distinctions. Finally I heard security bolts being drawn back, a key turning in the lock.

The door opened.

It was J.

She looked awful, her hair drawn severely back into a crude ponytail, a shabby coral-pink towelling robe tied tightly at her waist. She was pale and red-eyed.

I took in all this in an instant, but what actually registered most forcefully was the look on her face – a look that combined shock with what I now realize must have been fear.

"Marc," she said, and took a step back inside, still holding on to the door. And then: "How did you find me?"

I didn't move. I noticed that she was barefoot, and dimly it occurred to me that she must have just woken.

"Does it matter? I've been frantic, J."

Another figure appeared behind her – that of a tall middle-aged black guy.

"Everything all right?" he asked Julianne in a suspicious, protective tone.

"Are you alone?" she asked me.

"Of course I'm alone. I brought the Porsche. What's happened? Why did you leave?"

She swallowed air. "Marc, I can't talk to you now."

"I've come all this way," I said, unable to keep a wheedling note out of my voice. "I'm flying out to Los Angeles in a couple of hours. Cole wants to meet me. He loved the work we did on the Beatles' movie. You could come, too. I'm sure he'd want you as well."

A brief bitter laugh escaped her. She didn't take her eyes off my face. She looked haunted, scared.

"I'm finished with all that," she said dully.

"What?"

"You heard me, Marc. It's over. I'm never going back."

"I don't understand," I said. "What's happened? Was it something I said or did?"

A slow shake of the head.

"Then what?"

She'd stopped looking at me, was staring at the floor.

"Want me to get rid of him?" said the black guy.

"No, Neil," she said. "It's all right. I owe him something."

Neil retreated a little distance along the hallway but stood where he could still see me. The place looked like a typical run-down council flat – drab, functional décor, cheap furniture, all swamped with the stale smell of

poverty and neglect.

"Why are you living here?" I half-whispered to her. "We're rich."

"I don't want his money," she said, still looking at the floor. "I don't want any of it."

"Why? I don't understand. You've got to tell me what happened."

"Nothing happened, Marc. Except that I found out."

I made to put my hand under her chin, to lift up her face. She recoiled as if I was carrying an infectious disease.

"Found out what?" I said.

Another hesitation. "I found out who we are."

"What do you mean?"

"In some ways I envy you, Marc. You're still innocent."

"Innocent of what, J? Tell me. I love you. I was going to ask you to marry me."

Finally she did look up. There was pity and something else in her eyes. I know now it must have been shame.

For a moment I thought she was going to slam the door in my face. Then she said, "I can't talk to you here. Wait in the car. I'll get dressed and come out."

"You promise?"

"Please, Marc. Just give me five minutes."

Then she slowly closed the door.

I went back outside to the car. I sat on the bonnet in the rain, looking around. Many of the buildings were wide open to the elements and there was no other soul in sight. One of the more fortunate consequences of population decline was that people had been able to migrate to more salubrious areas, mostly to the senior citizens' complexes that were springing up around coastal resorts and bucolic locales within easy reach of the motorways. At the same time the under-30s had increasingly gravitated to the city centres where we formed our own enclaves. Julianne had always loved the vibrancy of central London. Why would she suddenly turn her back on it?

After a few minutes I heard a vehicle pull away from the rear of the building. I raced back inside, found the flat door open but both J and Neil gone. There was a big brown manila envelope on the coffee table in the living room. On it J had scribbled:

Marc,

I'm sorry.

Perhaps this will explain why we can never be together again.

J

When I got home I found a limousine waiting for me on the driveway. I'd packed the night before, so all that remained was to pick up my luggage and a blister-pack of tranquillizers for the journey. The chauffeuse – I'm sure she'd been chosen to remind me of Lilith – tried to strike up a conversation as we drove out towards Heathrow. I told her I wasn't in the mood for talking. Already the tranquillizers were taking me down, down into a warm mushy pit that I half-hoped I'd never crawl out of again.

I surfaced somewhere over the Atlantic, took a few more pills with three miniatures of Smirnoff. When I woke again I was in another limo, and the Gnome was sitting in the front next to the driver. She said nothing

to me when she saw I was awake. Which suited me fine. I kept looking at her warped contours, her little round eyes and flaccid lips, the way her head drooped down from her hunched back... it was all too much. I felt like vomiting over the cream leather and mahogany interior; but I didn't have the energy for even a token rebellion.

I have a blurred recollection of us pulling up outside a white mansion that looked like a huge meringue decorated with satellite dishes and surveillance equipment. It stood on dunes overlooking the Pacific. Cactus gardens ran all the way down to the beach.

I was bundled onto a bed in a darkened room and left alone for some time. It might have been minutes or hours; I was too befuddled to know. I started humming "Old King Cole," but what was actually running through my head was the chorus from the Dylan song: "*Something's happening, and you don't know what it is. Do you, Mr Jones?*" Except that I did know. I'd gone through all the documents that Julianne had left for me. They'd told me everything I needed to know.

For the thousandth time I began to wonder if I had been mad actually to have made the trip. Straight into the spider's web, the lion's den, the very heart of darkness. It would have been more sensible for me simply to disappear, like J had done. But I couldn't. I couldn't give it all up without knowing for sure. Apart from anything else it was a matter of pride.

Sometime later a tumbler was pressed to my lips. I'd taken a few gulps before I saw the webbed fingers and realized it was the Gnome. The tart liquid went down my throat like a shot of neat vodka. I was allowed to slump back on the pillow. As I lay there I felt my stupor slowly clearing. I managed to sit up.

"So," I said to the Gnome with a boldness I did not feel. "What now?"

She began shuffling towards the door.

"Take a shower," she told me. "Cole will see you in 30 minutes."

I was actually grateful for the Gnome's presence as she led me into one of Cole's private apartments. The man himself was standing at a big bay window overlooking the ocean, a lean figure dressed in a petrol blue suit. His black hair was cut short and slicked back from a prominent widow's peak, and he had a vintage California tan. He wore his trademark wraparound sunglasses with indigo lenses.

He didn't look around as we entered, just kept staring out the window, one palm flat against the glass. It was a studied pose of contemplative abstraction.

The room was very warm, not quite uncomfortably so. It was filled with tall lurid cacti and other succulents. They sprouted from gravel-filled pots, half obscuring prints and paintings in the style of Andy Warhol and Bridget Riley. Or maybe they were originals; I'm not an art expert. Along one wall was a big vivarium with a desert environment in which a turquoise lizard was basking on a rock.

The Gnome brought us into the centre of the room, then said, "Mr Marcus Jones."

Slowly Cole turned his head. His skin looked like polished suede, its wrinkling reversed by collagen therapy and telomere repair.

"Mr Jones," he said, smiling, offering his hand to invite me up the short flight of steps to the window.

I stepped up, taking his hand. His bony fingers closed around mine and I felt the parchment-dry texture of his skin. His grip was gentle but not feeble, a sense of strength being held at bay. Though he was greyhound-lean I could see the muscles in his neck. The severe tightness of skin at his throat that was evidence of decades of dedicated body maintenance.

"Thank you for coming," he said in a manner suggesting that I'd had a choice in the matter. "I understand you dislike air travel, so I'm doubly appreciative. I can't say I care much for airplanes myself."

He spoke in a kind of controlled whisper, as if using only the minimal energy required for speaking. His accent was transatlantic, that of a Brit long resident in the United States. The consensus was that he was probably of English origin and had been born some time around 1950.

"It was good of you to invite me," I said, a stock response that I'd rehearsed because I had to have something bland to say. "It's a great honour."

"Oh, no, the honour is mine. You're a very talented artist, Mr Jones. One of the very best we've had. You don't mind if I call you Marc?"

"Of course not," I responded, something beginning to crawl inside me.

There was a momentary pause that the Gnome filled by asking if we wanted any refreshments.

"Some minted green tea," Cole said. "Will that suffice for you, Marc?"

I nodded, already more unnerved than I wanted to be by his easy use of my Christian name.

The Gnome loped out, closing the door behind her. Cole motioned to a pair of curving terracotta leather sofas that bracketed the centre of the room. He moved agilely enough, though every step seemed to carry with it an excessive consciousness of its action that I'd often observed in the elderly, hale or not.

I took the sofa opposite him. There was a paperback on the glass-topped table between us. Ira Levin's *The Boys from Brazil*, in a contemporary 1970s edition. A little joke of Cole's, no doubt. Only it wasn't a joke. It was anything but.

I pressed my knees together and put my fists in my lap as if they were awkward objects that I didn't know what to do with. Cole sat back, cupping his hands behind his neck and crossing one leg so that his ankle rested on his knee – a young man's recumbent pose, I thought. I wondered if it was designed to impress me, then told myself I had to stop reading meaning into every nuance of his behaviour. I had never been entirely comfortable with the elderly, even my own parents. I resented their dominance over so many aspects of modern life, their aggressive overweening nostalgia which had infected my own generation so much that I had become a tool of it.

And Cole was the triumph of the aged personified. No

one knew how he had amassed his fortune, and opinion was divided on whether he had actually been a performer in those distant times or simply a music executive grown rich on the talents of others. Certainly he was an unreconstructed rock-and-roll man, his tastes largely mainstream, ranging from Chuck Berry and early Elvis through '60s guitar-based pop and West Coast rock to punk and grunge and even '90s Britpop. He'd emerged soon into the new century with his empire already expanding, youthful and media friendly, a living embodiment of the benefits of desenescent therapy that kept him, apparently, forever young.

But I knew better now. The documents in the manila envelope that Julianne had acquired (I thought I knew how) told a slightly different and more sinister story. And they had torn away the rickety scaffolding of my own sense of self.

I'd made the trip because I needed to know for sure. From his own lips. Or so I tried to tell myself. But as I sat opposite him and listened to his whispered compliments about my work, I realized that he would have to broach the subject before I did. I lacked the courage to tell him outright that I knew.

"We're fabulists, you and I," he was saying. "We put flesh on the stuff of dreams. That's a rare talent, Marc. A rare talent indeed."

"You're a creator of music yourself?"

I made the query sound casual, but he dismissed it with a flick of the hand. "I never discuss my own past. There's too much of it."

A hoarse laugh escaped him, as dry as the desert, as if all the usual fluids had long evaporated from his innards. I made myself smile.

"See all this?" he said, stretching out an arm to encompass the room. "Fabrications, every one. Even the reptiles in that glass case were grown from vats. To my express specifications. None of them exists in nature."

The cacti were cherry pink, chrome yellow, bile green. If Warhol had been into horticulture he would have loved such creations.

"We live in a world in which it becomes harder, and less necessary, to separate the real from the fabricated. And I welcome this, Marc – I positively encourage it. Of course I'm really just a dabbler, a player in one particular niche market. Who knows that perhaps even now someone just like me has a creative team engaged in recasting not just the history of rock to their own specifications. Why stop at music and the popular arts? Why not politics, literature, serious history itself? Might these not be re-tooled to the point where we can no longer distinguish between fact and fabrication? Perhaps it's already been done." He leaned forward, putting his hands together as though in prayer. "In which case, I might be able to ask you 20 questions about important events over the past 50 years and guarantee that all your answers would be wrong. In the end, the truth is just a matter of who talks the longest and most persuasively."

I wondered if he was about to give me such a test, but then he made a dismissive gesture, as if already bored with the subject.

"Luckily my memory is long," he went on, "and there's nothing like the true thrill of the original, wouldn't you agree?"

He pressed something on the table console and suddenly the room filled with music. It was Arthur Lee singing "Live and Let Die" from Love's 1967 *Forever Changes* album.

I forced a grin on to my face, seeing only the monochrome swirl of the Riley painting reflected in his lenses. My father had played the album endlessly when I was a child, and I knew the song well. Arthur Lee's mellifluous voice was a subversive counterpoint to lyrics about snot caking against his pants and turning into crystal. When it came to the line about the bluebird sitting on a branch, Cole mimed the motions of taking a pistol, his first two fingers outstretched. He squinted along them, grinning, pointing straight at my heart. It was sheer pantomime but I was a five-year-old in the front seat, trying desperately not to get up and run.

Then the Gnome shambled in with a tray of drinks. Never had I been more pleased to see her. Cole stopped the music and sat back while she poured the tea into two glass cups with a cascade of ice cubes.

I practically snatched my cup from the tray and swallowed a big mouthful.

"Do you require anything else?" the Gnome asked in the servile tone of mistress to master.

Cole shook his head without looking at her. She retreated. The door closed again.

Outside, the sky was turning deep blue as evening gathered. Cole abruptly silvered the window. Subdued recessed lights came on around the room.

"As I've grown older," he remarked, "I've become more of a nocturnal creature. I find too much light hurts. Or perhaps it's just a reversion to the habits of my youth."

Another dry laugh. He removed his sunglasses and laid them on the low table between us.

His eyes were reptilian.

Oh, they were human enough, after a fashion, and perhaps even his originals rather than regrowths. But they had a satiny sheen, as if they had absorbed so much over the many years of his life that they were satiated, no longer capable of expressing the normal range of human emotions.

Cole showed me his perfect teeth in a leisurely smile. I tried to tell myself that he was just giving me the kind of performance he had staged throughout his public life, that of the cryptic and esoteric personality who doubtless relished unnerving ordinary mortals. But I had every reason to be unnerved.

"Time we talked about the actual matter of why I invited you here," he said. "Of course you've read all the documentation we provided for you, and you know that you're a genetically identical copy of myself."

I couldn't believe he was actually admitting this. I hadn't expected the stark truth. I hadn't imagined he would know that I knew.

I heard myself say, "A clone."

"No, no, no," he said emphatically. "A *replica*, not a clone. When my parents bowed out I had their bodies put

on ice. Nowadays it's a relatively straightforward matter to extract the DNA from their tissue samples, splice and combine them in exactly the same sequence that originally produced me. It's a technology we've been developing for decades."

By trial and error, I thought. The Gnome being an example of an imperfect product. A sister of mine, one generation removed. She must have known. She must have known everything.

I swallowed, said, "And Julianne, too."

"Of course. There are more. There have been quite a few more, but you two were the most promising. One can have the recipe perfect but never be sure how it will actually cook. In both your cases the results exceeded our expectations. It was essential we made you part of our creative team."

He was silent for a moment. I had so many questions I didn't know which to ask first. And I was also scared.

"She doesn't look like me," I managed to say, though I did recall one occasion when we'd been mistaken for brother and sister. Jules and I had laughed it off.

"Do you think I'm into carbon copies?" Cole replied with a hint of distaste. "The phenotype's easy to vary. You can customize whatever you want. It's like having different models of the same car."

"Guy and all the others," I said, half incredulously. "They're *replicas* too?"

He looked both surprised and amused. "Jesus, it's not a fucking *industry*, Marc. Do you think I've been running some kind of chicken farm? The others are just talented individuals whose services we acquired. You're one of a very select group. I have to say we never imagined a romance would develop between you and your brood sister. Personally I have no issue with it, especially when it was so fertile for both of you. But unfortunately it muddied other waters."

His tone and manner suggested sympathetic regret, a sense that only practical considerations of his own were a bar to my continuing to have a sexual relationship with my *brood sister*. Probably the Gnome had sent Julianne all the documentation before they arranged matters so that I would find out.

"Naturally I use the word 'fertile' in the creative sense," he went on with the jocular air of someone who had inadvertently coined a pun. "There would have been no question of biological conception because both of you are infertile. Though that can easily be reversed if you ever develop a yearning for fatherhood."

I glanced towards the door. I wanted to get out of there, make a run for it. But I knew it wasn't a realistic option.

"You planted us with childless parents who would raise us as their own," I said. "But under strict guidelines designed to foster the artistic talents you wanted."

He shrugged. "They loved you like true parents, believe me. And they were handsomely rewarded."

Tears were running down my face. "Why females as well as males?"

"Variety," he said. "And a sense of keeping all options open. They tell me it's a simple matter to tweak the sex chromosomes without affecting the somatic cells." Another

shrug, as if the technicalities bored him.

"You still haven't explained why," I said.

"Why do you think?"

I looked briefly away from his relentless lizard gaze. Listening hard enough, I thought I could just hear the sound of the surf on the beach beyond the window.

"Why did you come, Marc, when you knew all this?"

"I didn't believe it."

"Yes, you did. You knew you were my flesh, my creature. You knew I'd want something more of you. You're my ultimate repo-man."

I tried to shut out the sound of his laughter. I knew that when the time came I'd have the courage to deny him what he wanted. That would be my salvation.

"I'm old, Marc. Old, old, old. They can keep me alive more or less indefinitely, but my body will no longer do what I want it to do with the vigour and spunk of true youth. It's like having a heart of glass. I want to be free again to express myself as I used to in my prime."

"You want my body."

He made a noise as though to suggest I was being overdramatic. "Not in any permanent sense, I assure you. A rental arrangement, with minimal inconvenience."

I tried to shake my head. I couldn't move it.

"No," I managed to blubber. "I won't do it."

"Do you really think there's a choice? Do you think you can just get up and walk out of here? I'm afraid it's already too late for that. All records of your visit are being erased even as we speak. There might have been a plane crash, or you might well have simply disappeared, just as your sister tried to do."

"You've got her?"

He waved his hand, though whether in denial or refusal to answer I didn't know. I tried to get up, and found I couldn't move. My brain felt perfectly clear but the motor centres weren't functioning.

I began to gibber. "I won't do it! You can't make me!"

Cole rose and circled the table to crouch beside me. He put a hand on my knee.

"I'm not asking for your life, Marc. Just an occasional loan of your body. After all, it is in a sense mine anyway."

"No! Never!"

Though I yelled, I barely managed to get out the words. My vocal cords were seizing up.

"There really is no choice. I'm afraid you were misled into thinking that the process only works on a voluntary basis. With suitable sedation, *anyone* can be a host."

There are mornings when I wake up and wonder who I am. My entire body will ache and my throat will be sore. Sometimes I'll stink of sex or cigarette smoke or have a headache so bad I can't get out of bed. Naturally I have no recollection of what he did. At least they told me the truth about that aspect of imprinting: the host retains no memory of the occupier's actions.

The Gnome lets me wander the mansion gardens and the beach; she feeds and waters me whenever I need it. The pity and disgust I used to feel for her I now see reflected in her beady eyes. She knows she's the lucky one; he's never going to want to use her.

I think I know how he passes his time inside my head. It's always at night, usually on a Friday or Saturday. Weekdays he probably has other hosts, and I try not to dwell on the thought that one of them might be Julianne, whom he might favour for "variety." I no longer ask questions. I tell myself I'm an empty vessel now, without curiosity, existing solely for the use of my creator. Whenever I think of J it's always with a sense of loss rather than horror or outrage. In our innocence we had a great thing going, and even now I'd exchange knowledge for blissful ignorance if it meant I could have it back.

They put me out with drugs at sunset and I don't wake again until the morning. At first it was an injection, but now that I've capitulated it comes in the form of a hot creamy drink. That's as much as I know. I've never even seen the chair and headset. The longest I've been out is 36 hours, though the average is twelve. It's all pretty painless, and, they assure me, without risk. As safe as milk.

I'm pretty certain Cole spends his time in me doing what he used to do, or always wanted to do: he struts on stage to play memorial rock and roll. Maybe he's even got a band of similarly imprinted centurions and they perform to an appreciative crowd of 20th-century folk. Perhaps even the audience is imprinted as well, thousands upon thousands of them all planted in the bodies of hosts from my own generation. No doubt there's the usual aftermath of booze and drugs and sex. That's how it used to be in the old days; and Cole is, above all, a traditionalist.

Needless to say, in my own waking hours I don't make music any more. I have neither the energy nor the inclination, and it seems that my services are no longer in demand. I do nothing except inhabit Cole's mansion like a particularly exotic pet. Sometimes, as I wander the beach chaperoned by the Gnome or some other minion I fantasize about coming across an empty bottle amongst the driftwood and posting a *Help! Save me!* note that I'd toss out into the waves when no one was looking. Of course I know it would be a futile gesture. Whoever got rescued by a message in a bottle?

I keep thinking there should be some contemporary artist who expresses my predicament; but though I've got access to vast electronic archives of the world's culture at the mansion I've never been able to find anything appropriate. Instead I tell myself that I'm not here and that this isn't happening. Recognize the lines? They're from Radiohead's "How to Disappear Completely." Which is at least of this century. Just.

On the rare occasions when I can drag myself out of my slough of self-pity I can't help thinking about Cole as a performing artist. I wonder what music he plays and whether in his repertoire he ever includes any of my songs.

Christopher Evans is the author of the linked short-story collection *Chimeras* (1992) and the notable sf novels *Aztec Century* (1993) – a BSFA Award-winner in 1994 – and *Mortal Remains* (1995), among other books. Of Welsh background, he has lived in London for many years. He has contributed stories just twice to *Interzone* before – "Artefacts" (issue 23) and "Transmutations" (issue 53), two of the stories which went to make up *Chimeras*. It's good to welcome him back.

NUCLEON

David D. Levine

“**T**atyrzczinski,” he said, extending his hand. “Karel Tatyrzczinski.” His blue eyes sparkled under bushy white eyebrows, set in a round pink face. Wispy white hair tried, and failed, to cover a shiny pink scalp. That clean pink and white head emerged from the world’s grimmest coverall. It was a fascinating contrast; I thought he’d make a great coloured-pencil sketch. I liked him immediately.

I took the hand and shook it. “Pleased to meet you, Mr Tat... um...”

“Tatter-zin-ski,” he repeated. “Call me Carl. What are you looking for, Mr...?”

“James. Phil James. It’s kind of difficult to explain. I’ll know it when I see it.”

“Well,” he said, extending his hands to encompass the piles of objects all around him, “whatever it is, I’ve got it.” I was inclined to believe him.

STUFF FOR SALE read the sign above the gate, matching the one-line listing in the Yellow Pages that had led me to this place. It was way, *way* off the beaten path; I was glad I’d called ahead for directions.

The name was apt. A stolid 1920s Craftsman-style house, with an unfortunate skin condition of yellow 1970s asphalt shingles, sat in the middle of piles and piles of... stuff. Heaps of sinks. Stacks of televisions. Three barrels of shoes. File cabinets labelled CHAINS, DOORKNOBS, ALTERNATORS. A haphazard-looking structure of pipes and blue plastic sheeting kept the rain off the more fragile pieces, but a row of toilets standing by the fence wore beards of moss. The piles went on and on... he must have had at least a couple of acres. Through a window I saw that the house was just as crowded inside.

“I’m a commercial artist,” I explained. “I’m doing a series of illustrations I call ‘junklets’ – gadgets made of junk. It’s for a new ad campaign. The company wants to show how innovative and inventive it is. So what I need is stuff that *looks* interesting, things I can put together with other things in my pictures. It doesn’t matter what it is, or whether or not it works.” I pulled my digital camera out of my coat pocket. “Actually, all I need is reference photos. But I can pay you for your time.”

“No need. I’m always glad to help an artist.” He rubbed his chin with a grime-encrusted hand. The work-hardened skin scratched against his beard stubble. “Lessee.

I think I had some old dentist equipment...” Suddenly he burst into motion and I had to scramble to keep up.

Down an alley of refrigerators, right turn at an old monitor-top Frigidaire, hard left at an ancient glass-fronted Coke machine, and there we were at a barrel of dental drills from the early 1900s. All joints and cables and black crinkle-finish metal struts, it looked like a family reunion of daddy-longlegs. “This is great!” I said. I snapped a dozen pictures of the barrel just as it stood, then asked him to haul out a few choice pieces for closer examination. I wanted dozens of jointed arms for my Shoe-Tying Machine, and these would be perfect. “What else have you got that’s like this? Mechanical. Early Twentieth-Century stuff.”

“Hmm. Follow me.” And he was off again, past racks of doors and windows, with me trailing in his wake. A moment later he was lifting a blue tarp from a huge shelving unit, revealing ranks of radios: streamlined Bakelite Emersons, shiny chrome Bendixes, squat, blocky Motorolas. A harvest of design from the ’20s to the ’50s.

“These are phenomenal! I love old radios!”

“Most of ’em don’t work any more, I’m afraid...”

“I don’t care.” I picked up a sleek Emerson from the ’30s. The original ivory finish had yellowed, but it was in gorgeous shape. “They just don’t design things like this any more. How much do you want for it?”

“Twenty-five. Naah, make it twenty-two fifty.”

“I’ll take it.” I tucked the radio under my arm. “But. These are too... unitary. For my junklets I need parts. Moving parts.”

“I know just the thing.” He zipped through a gap between two piles of tires. Juggling the radio and my camera, I followed as best I could.

The entire afternoon went like that. I filled the camera’s memory – over 300 images – and wound up taking home two boxes of stuff as well. Not that I needed any of it, not that I had room for any of it, but it was all just fabulous. How could I leave this keen little eggbeater behind? I’d never seen another one like it. I put most of my finds on my knick-knack shelves as soon as I got home.

After dinner I transferred the pictures into my computer, then started sorting, organizing, and cogitating. The hydraulic cylinder from the old forklift could support the seat of that office chair, and I could pull in the con-

trol panel from the red generator as well. By the time I reluctantly shut down at 3 AM I had images for a dozen junklets sorted into folders.

Bright and early the next day – by which I mean noon – I booted up my computer again and put a big newsprint pad on my drawing board. All afternoon I sketched, popping up images on the monitor whenever I needed reference or inspiration. Most of my friends think I'm weird, using paper and pencil to draw images from a computer screen, but it works for me. I've never been comfortable drawing with a mouse or a stylus, but managing reference photos with a computer beats shuffling piles of prints.

Three days later I was back at STUFF FOR SALE again. "Carl, the pictures I got last time were great. I need some more. What have you got that's big and flat and heavy and goes around?"

"What, like an old record player?"

"Yeah, but bigger."

"I think I might have something for you." He took me to a huge rotating platform, must have weighed a ton, made of rusty waffle-patterned iron. Neither of us could figure out what it had originally been used for, but it would be a perfect base for my Plastering Machine. While we were clearing some mannequins out of the way so I could get far enough back for a good photo, the bell on the front gate rang. "Scuse me while I tend to a paying customer," Carl said.

"Take your time," I replied. "I can look around on my own." Carl vanished down a row of bookcases.

After I finished up with the platform, I wandered around. I needed a big, tubby body for the Automated Barber, some tubes and pipes for the Plant Waterer, and a whole lot of irons for the Ironing Machine. But everywhere I went, all I found was... junk. Boxy, boring washing machines. Cracked water bottles. Hundreds of olive-drab ammo cases. Rusty metal shelving. I took a picture of a row of vending machines because I thought it was a nice composition, but I didn't see anything remotely useful for my project. I was getting pretty frustrated when Carl returned.

"I haven't found anything. Where's the good stuff?"

"It's all good stuff, to the right person. What are you looking for?"

"Well, first off, something with a round, tubby body. Person-sized."

"I know just the thing." He jogged down the row of washing machines, took a left turn. "How's this?" he asked, gesturing to a bulbous chrome 1950s water cooler.

"It's perfect!" I started snapping pictures, but something nagged at me. "Wait a minute. I was just here a minute ago. I stood on this very spot and took a picture of those vending machines over there. See?" I paged back through my stored pictures, showed him the vending machines on the camera's screen. "This water cooler is just what I was looking for. Why didn't I see it before?"

"I dunno. It hasn't moved lately." Indeed, there was grass growing through the holes in its base. How could I have missed it? "Sometimes folks can't find what they're looking for even if it's right in front of them. Sometimes

they need a little help. Speaking of which, can I help you find anything else?"

"Uh, yeah. Some irons. Clothes irons."

"Right over here." But as I followed, I couldn't help but look back over my shoulder at the water cooler. I would have sworn there was nothing interesting in this whole area.

I visited STUFF FOR SALE two more times in the next three weeks. Carl never failed to find just the gizmo, gewgaw, or whatchamacallit I needed to complete my drawings, and I never failed to buy something. I spent over 200 dollars on old radios alone. But it was worth it. I had all the reference images I needed; I had inspiration; I was happy. I turned out more and better work in less time than I ever had since art school.

That was just the beginning. The agency loved my junklets. The client loved my junklets. The industry loved my junklets; I even got my name in *Advertising Age*. The client ordered a second series of junklets, then another. They used my Automated Barber as the background image on their corporate stationery.

With all that publicity, I was inundated with new clients. I soon found myself with more work than I could handle and more money than I'd ever imagined. But I knew I was just the flavour of the month; I'd seen other artists rise meteorically and then vanish just as quickly. So I got myself a financial adviser, kept my frugal lifestyle (well, mostly), and put the extra cash into mutual funds.

Everyone wanted junklets, or something like junklets. I was constantly in need of more mechanical images, more inspirations. I sometimes visited Carl three times in a week. We got to be pals.

One day we were sitting in Carl's kitchen, sharing a beer after a long hot afternoon tramping around the junkyard. "Tell me, Phil," he said, "how did you get into this crazy advertising business anyway?"

I thought about it for a moment. "I suppose you'd have to blame my dad. He was an automotive designer at Ford. When I was a kid I'd visit him at his office during the summer; he'd always let me play with his coloured pencils. I guess that's where I caught the art bug."

"Ford, eh? Did your dad design anything I might have seen?"

"He was on the team that did the '66 Fairlane. But mostly he did conceptual designs. It was exciting for him to be out beyond the cutting edge like that, but he was always disappointed that none of his designs made it into actual production." I took a swig of my beer. "He worked on the Nucleon."

Carl put down his beer. "Nucleon?"

"It was a concept car for a World's Fair or something like that. A nuclear-powered car, can you believe it? Atoms for peace."

Carl got a strange look on his face then. "I have something out back that I think you ought to see."

The sun was low in the sky, casting neon-orange glints off the hoods of a row of old cars all the way at the back

of the yard, where we'd seldom gone before. Bees buzzed in the shrubs that grew along the fence. Near one end of the row was a bulky shape shrouded in a moss-covered olive-drab tarp. "Help me haul this off, would you?"

We pulled off the tarp and revealed one of the strangest-looking cars you've ever seen. It looked like a cross between an old Caddy with big pointed fins and a pickup truck, and where the trunk, or pickup bed, should have been there was a big square hole that went all the way down to the ground. It looked like a car with a built-in swimming pool.

It was painted in that Godawful turquoise colour that was so popular in the '50.

On the tailgate was a name in chrome script: *Nucleon*.

"Sonofabitch! You've got the mockup! I didn't even know they built one!"

"Take a closer look."

I looked. It was no fibreglass mockup. It was real steel, and a little rusty. The doors were scarred with parking-lot dings. The tyres were bald. The seats and the steering wheel were worn from use. The odometer showed 71,000 and some miles.

There was no gas gauge.

Suddenly I got a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. "Carl... do you, by any chance, have... a Geiger counter?"

"You know, I think I might. Hang on a sec."

I just stood and stared slack-jawed at the thing while Carl left and came back.

"Here it is."

"Check out the back first. The reactor was really heavy; it had its own wheels. It rode in that hole, kind of like a trailer only surrounded by the car." Carl waved the Geiger counter's wand around inside the hole. There was a slight increase in the chattering noise it made, but only a little. "Any idea how much radiation is too much?"

"Not a clue."

"Still, it doesn't seem too bad."

"No."

"But it's not zero. That means this car once had a nuclear reactor. It was a fucking *nuclear car*!"

"Jesus."

We sat in the grass, leaning our backs against a nearby Camaro, and watched the air shimmer over the Nucleon's sun-warmed roof. Crickets chirped. Carl plucked a long stalk of grass and chewed on it thoughtfully.

"Where did you get this thing, anyway?" I asked.

He stared off at the setting sun for a while, then shook his head. "Sorry, I don't remember. I know it wasn't here when I bought the place back in '48."

"How can you forget buying an atomic car? You remember everything else about this place."

"It's a funny thing." He looked down into his cupped hands. "Usually it's pretty simple. Like, suppose you wanted a carburettor for a '52 Mercury. I'd know where to look, and I might find one or I might not. But sometimes, like with the Nucleon here" – he gestured at it with the stalk – "I remember exactly where it is, but I don't remember remembering it before, if you catch the distinction." He looked right at me then, his eyes hard.

"I'm only telling you this because you're an artist. If I told my buddies at the VFW they'd have me locked up."

"My lips are sealed."

"I knew you'd understand."

The sun was setting behind the Nucleon, and the breeze was cooling. "What are we going to do with this thing?" I asked. "I sure don't have any place to park it."

"Cover it over with the tarp again, I guess. Maybe it'll be here tomorrow, maybe not. There's no telling."

We hauled the tarp back over that impossible car and walked back to the gate in silence. Then I turned to him and said, simply, "Thank you."

"You're welcome," he replied. He closed the gate behind me, and as I drove off I saw him sitting on the porch, staring off into the darkening sky.

After another year or so the blush was off the apple and I was no longer the hot new thing. Just as well, really; I was tired of junklets, tired of juggling assignments, tired of airports. I settled back into a career that was a lot like it had been before, only now I had a cushion of investments that meant I didn't have to hustle so hard between assignments. I was happy enough, I suppose, though sometimes I missed those crazy junklet days.

I was doing a lot of stuff based on natural forms and landscapes then, getting my reference photos on nature hikes, and I didn't see Carl very often. We always exchanged Christmas cards, though. Then one day I got a phone message from him: would I please come out to the yard, as soon as possible?

"Glad you could make it," he said as I walked up his porch steps the next day. He was sitting on a battered wire milk crate, looking like a broken grey umbrella. His health had been poor for months, though he rarely complained.

"No problem," I said. "How did you get my number?" He'd never called before.

"It was on your cheques. Listen, I know this is going to seem strange, but I found this at the bottom of a coffee can full of bolts and somehow I just knew it belongs to you." He held out a small metallic object.

It was a key, a scarred brass thing, one of those ones that's the same on both sides. Smaller than a car key, bigger than a suitcase key. "I don't recognize it."

"You're sure? I don't get these feelings often, and when I do they're usually right."

"I'm pretty sure. Sorry."

"Well, keep it anyway. Memento of an old man's folly. Sorry I dragged you out here for nothing."

"That's OK, I was thinking of coming out for a visit anyway." We spent a pleasant hour on the porch, watching the leaves fall and talking about contact lenses, fast food, and the weather. Then I bought some flowerpots and went home.

Two weeks later I got a call from Laurel Hernandez, Carl's lawyer. Carl had died in his sleep, at the age of 78, and I was mentioned in his will. The funeral was Tuesday; the will would be read the next week.

I met dozens of people at the funeral, all of whom Carl had touched in some significant way. A woman for whom

Carl had found a vibrating chair that was the only thing that made her bad back tolerable. A man who had kept a fleet of delivery trucks going with spare parts from Carl's yard. A family that had rebuilt a shoddy old house into a showplace, using materials and fixtures provided by Carl, and helped to revitalize their whole neighbourhood. We spent the afternoon swapping Carl stories; it was a sad occasion, but not sombre.

The will reading was a lot less crowded. There was me, and Ms Hernandez, and a clerk, and a couple of cousins. The cousins got the investments, which were not trivial. I got the junkyard.

I told Ms Hernandez I needed a couple of days to think about my options. But I was only halfway down the stairs from her office when I realized I already knew exactly what to do. I sat down right there on the steps and cried, overwhelmed by the generosity of Carl's final gift.

Ms Hernandez drove me out to the yard after the transfer of title, a complicated ceremony involving the signing of more papers than I'd ever seen in my life. "Are you sure you don't want me to find a management company to run the business for you?" she asked as we got out of the car.

"I'm sure. I plan to keep on as a contract artist part-time, at least for a while, but this is what I want to do. Where I want to be. However, I'd appreciate the services of an experienced business lawyer."

"I would be happy to help."

The gate was padlocked. I'd never seen it padlocked before.

I stood there for a moment, not knowing what to do, and then I put my hands in my jacket pockets and felt something hard. It was the key Carl had given me the last time I saw him, which was also the last time I'd worn that jacket.

On impulse, I tried it in the padlock.

It worked.

We got inside and wandered around the yard. Ms Hernandez didn't seem to think it was odd that I had a key to the gate, and I decided not to mention the circumstances under which I'd acquired it.

We paused before a rank of vacuum cleaners, a faded rainbow of aqua and pink and beige plastic. "Mr Tatyrczinski was one of my favourite clients," Ms Hernandez said. "He gave me a bust of Kennedy for my birthday one year. Kennedy was my hero, but I don't think I ever mentioned that to him. Somehow he always knew just the right thing to do."

"Maybe he didn't know. Maybe the junkyard knew."

"What?"

"Never mind. Wait a minute, I just remembered something." I walked down to the end of the row of appliances, paused a moment, turned left. There, on a battered chrome dinette table, was a jar of buttons. I opened it, dug around for a moment. "Here. I think Carl would have liked you to have this."

It was a campaign pin in red, white, and blue. It was a little faded, but still plainly readable: RE-ELECT JFK IN '64.

"This must have been some kind of joke," Ms Her-

nandez said.

"Maybe. Or maybe it's a little memento from a time that never was. A time that was better than this one."

"What a... a lovely thought. In any case, if I were your business lawyer I would caution you against giving away merchandise to friends and relatives. It's a common problem for new business owners."

"OK, I'll take three bucks for it. Naah, make it two-fifty."

"It's a deal."

We stood side by side and watched the sun set over the junkyard.

David D. Levine, who has just won this year's James White Award with the above story, is a longtime science-fiction reader who is astonished to discover that he is suddenly an sf writer as well. He attended Clarion West in 2000, made his first sale in March 2001, won second place in the Writers of the Future contest in July, and has sold three more stories since then. Two of his stories are in the anthologies *Bones of the World* edited by Bruce Holland Rogers (available now) and *Apprentice Fantastic* edited by Martin H. Greenberg and Russell Davis (coming in 2002). David lives with his wife Kate Yule in Portland, Oregon, where he holds various software jobs. His web page can be found at: www.spiritone.com/~dlevine/

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DAVID LANGFORD

Nothing new to be said here about the horrors of 11 September 2001, except for one gleam of slightly selfish cheer: our own people, the sf writing, publishing and fan community in America, all seem to be physically unharmed. The bad dreams continue, and as I write we seem to be at war...

ONE IS ONE

Brian Aldiss told the on-line *Guardian* his theory about *AI*'s relatively modest takings when first launched: "Perhaps audiences tired of David's winsomeness... Perhaps – my money is on this one – it is just too intelligent for adolescents, to judge by the initial runaway box-office success of the moronic new *Planet of the Apes*." Also, "Of course there is no love affair, no archetypal boy meeting archetypal girl... The very missing item that excludes science fiction from wider popularity."

Samuel Z. Arkoff (1918-2001), co-founder of American International Pictures, died on 15 September aged 83. AIP was noted for cheap teenage exploitation movies: *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein*, *Invasion of the Saucer Men*, etc, etc.

Berry Berenson (1948-2001), actress/photographer who appeared in the 1982 *Cat People* remake, was on Flight 11 on 11 September. She was the widow of *Psycho*'s Anthony Perkins.

Gwyneth Jones responded to my anodyne comments on her "seized" *Interzone* story: "Terribly sorry about the not-remotely-arousing juvenile porn. May I recommend *The Amber Spyglass*, which has some hot scenes with underage teens making out."

John Cunningham Lilly, (1915-2001), the experimental psychologist whose work on dolphin intelligence

and communication inspired several sf stories, died on 30 September.

Bryan Talbot sent the heavily annotated CD-ROM version of his spiffy graphic novel *Heart of Empire* (Dark Horse 2001), and I discovered with a thrill of pride that I am cross-referenced under "Old Farters."

Gordon Van Gelder's *Magazine of Fantasy and SF* holding company is SPILOGALE, which (I speculated) must be some menacing global organization whose HQ gets detonated at the close of a James Bond movie. "I picked it in part because it sounds so unusual. In point of fact, it's the name of the genus of spotted skunks on which my father wrote his doctoral dissertation."

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Science Corner. *Radio Times* coverage of the new TV science series *Space* was firmly grounded in old Larry Niven stories: "*Space* boasts enough gee-whiz facts to satisfy any statistic-hungry schoolboy, but isn't afraid to go beyond the science into the realms of entertainment and speculation. Particularly high on the agenda is an insistence on the fragility of life on this planet – the Solar System is swarming with black holes waiting to devour us..." (Rupert Smith, *Radio Times*)

Publishers & Sinners. House of Stratus, the UK publisher using print-on-demand technology to reissue countless books including Brian Aldiss's backlist, has reportedly gone into administration. HoS shares ceased trading in July and the London office closed in September.

The Greasy Pole. *British Fantasy Awards* presented 23 September: NOVEL (Derleth Award) *Perdido Street Station*, China Miéville. ANTHOLOGY *Hideous Progeny* ed Brian Willis. COLLECTION *Where the Bodies Are Buried*, Kim Newman. SHORT *Naming of Parts*, Tim Lebbon. ARTIST Jim Burns. Small Press PS Publishing. KARL EDWARD WAGNER AWARD Peter Haining... *Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire* (France): won by Christopher Priest's story "The Discharge," trans Maryvonne Sossé as "Retour au foyer" (*Destination 3000*, ed Silverberg & Jacques Chambon).

Thog Speechless. In the aftermath of the fallen towers, a special sf good taste award goes to Author Services Inc for seizing this chance to promote a claimed *Battlefield Earth* TV series. The "connection" is a godawful L. Ron Hubbard "peace song" that helpfully informs the world: "Snarls and strife must be at end! / In peace alone can this earth mend."

The Stephen Baxter Interview. An erudite fan wondered whether the mysteriously appearing Red Moon in Mr Baxter's *Origin* was a homage to the similar device in *The Red Moon Mystery*, a Dan Dare yarn by Frank Hampson. Confronted by your columnist with this smoking gun, the author said: "Sadly Dan is a bit before my time, and I don't know the *RMM*..."

Retro Science. Our correspondent Marcus Rowland has unearthed the shape of things to come: "The world is now the shape of a globe, the shape which gives the biggest possible bulk for its surface, but the inside of the earth is still cooling and condensing, and the internal changes are slowly changing its shape. The surface, already condensed to its utmost, will not change with the core; it cannot reduce its area, but it adapts itself to the shrinking interior by taking a shape which occupies less bulk. So the earth is to become a tetrahedron, a sort of pyramid, the shape which gives the smallest bulk for its surface." (Arthur Mee, *My Magazine*, May 1918)

The Encyclopedia of SF is about due for a third edition, and if plans go ahead the co-editors are likely to be John Clute and David Langford, with Peter Nicholls stepping down as Editor Emeritus.

Clash of Symbols. After years of deliberation, the Unicode Technical Committee turned down the proposal to include Klingon in the Unicode Standard (unique codes for every character of every language in the world), austere dismissing it as "inappropriate for encoding." However, Bernard Shaw's little-known, less-used phonetic alphabet "Shavian" made it into the Standard, and Tolkien's Tengwar alphabet is still "under investigation."

Thog's Masterclass. "His mossy, crimson eyebrows threatened to leap off his face and attack at any moment." (Jayme Lynne Blaschke, "The Dust," 1998) "With one last crushing gesture he crammed his fist to his ears and dropped dead." "A rabbit thumped and ran in Timothy's chest." "Like ghosts? 'Which use people's ears to look out their eyes!'" (all Ray Bradbury, *From the Dust Returned*, 2001) "She had an annoying habit of running her tongue over his teeth, and as she did that, he realised there was absolutely nothing between them." (Jackie Collins, *Hollywood Wives: The New Generation*, 2001) "Philip retreated into the insect personality, growing almost silent except for his constant cries for help..." (Robert I. Katz, *Edward Maret*, 2001) "The last chance to stop the operation had passed by. The die was now cast, if not yet thrown." (Tom Clancy, *Debt of Honor*, 1994)

Storms of Numbers, Chalices of Light

David Zindell
interviewed by
Nick Gevers

David Zindell is one of America's most ambitious science-fiction and fantasy writers. His cogent poeticism and cosmic concerns are embodied in long, extravagantly inventive, and philosophically penetrating novels; his imagined universes are sublimely conceived arenas for vast spiritual and intellectual combats between the Dark and the Light. Rigorously mystical, and mystically rigorous, Zindell describes external quests with elaborate inner resonances and ramifications; his are among the most thematically acute adventure narratives to be found in contemporary speculative fiction.

Zindell's first great epic had its roots in an early short story, "Shanidar" (1985). This tale's city of Neverness, a meeting place for the cultures of a luxuriantly evoked and exotically populous far-future human-dominated Milky Way Galaxy, evolved into the setting for *Neverness* (1988), an impressive first novel. The narrator, Mallory Ringess, progressed from a pilot's training to literal godhood; and, secluded in divinity, he went on to tell the story of his modest but messianic son, Danlo, in the voluminous trilogy *A Requiem for Homo Sapiens*, consisting of *The Broken God* (1993), *The Wild* (1995), and *War in Heaven* (1998). Danlo is a paragon of spiritual evolution, and, in battling his blood brother and terrible foe Hanuman li Tosh, he carries with him into hopeful but understated transcendence not only Mallory's concupiscent friend, Bardo, but Neverness's resident Order of Mystic Mathematicians and proba-

bly the entire human universe as well.

Now, with *The Lightstone* – his first fantasy novel – Zindell has commenced a second Cycle, set on the continent of Ea on one of the many Earthlike worlds of a cosmos known as Eluru. Ancient wars between good and evil factions of angels continue in the superficially mundane conflicts of feudal Ea; a Dark Lord, Morjin, seeks to control the Lightstone, a sort of ultimate Holy Grail, and is defied by the paladin Valashu Elahad and his six fated companions. The intensity of the resulting narrative is extraordinary.

I interviewed David Zindell by e-mail in June 2001, not long before *The Lightstone* was released in Britain by HarperCollins/Voyager.

NG: All of your books are, conspicuously, epics – long, heroic in plot and diction, full of grand confrontation and even grander aspiration. Your new novel, *The Lightstone*, is an enormous saga in its own right, yet it is only the first volume in a quartet. What predisposes you to the epic form?

DZ: I keep trying to cram as much of the world as I can into my work, to look at it in detail and to examine it under extraordinary pressure, and for these purposes, the epic is ideal. And as you imply, epics allow for, and practically demand, heroics, grand confrontations and grander aspirations – all matters which are my main personal and literary concerns. I view life, if lived rightly, as essentially being heroic. Now, we live in an age

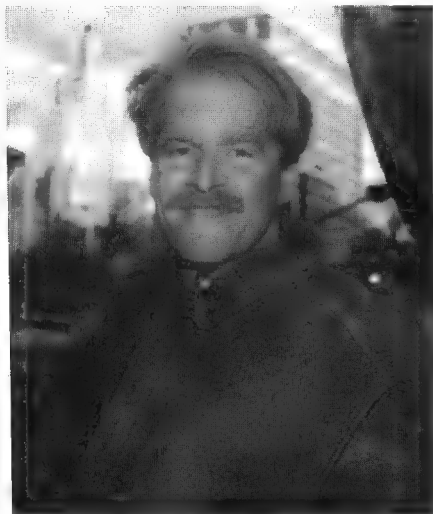


Photo: Beth Gwinn

where even sports superstars are called “heroes,” but that is a degrading of the word. Such people do accomplish the extraordinary against great odds – but they do it primarily for fame, money and vainglory, and sometimes, the best motive, I think, to fulfil a sense of excellence within themselves. They make sacrifices, true, but in the end for themselves. Real heroes are willing to sacrifice a great deal – ultimately their very lives – for love of something greater than themselves: whether a mother who literally gives of her body and the precious hours of her life for her child or a warrior who dies defending his homeland. We’re all selfish creatures, of course, and it’s all too easy to fall into the evil of the war of all against all. But we’re also something much more, and our deepest motivation is toward the realization of this higher self and greater good. So I believe that the literature that moves us the most deeply is the heroic, because it shows us our best possibilities as well as stirring up a great thrill of fear of bringing forth the darkness that is also inside us. It makes us aware of the tremendous purpose and meaning of life – and that life really is being lived for great stakes. Even those caught in existential crisis, cynicism, grinding poverty and despair must sense, in their hearts, that we are all involved in a great drama for the fate of the earth.

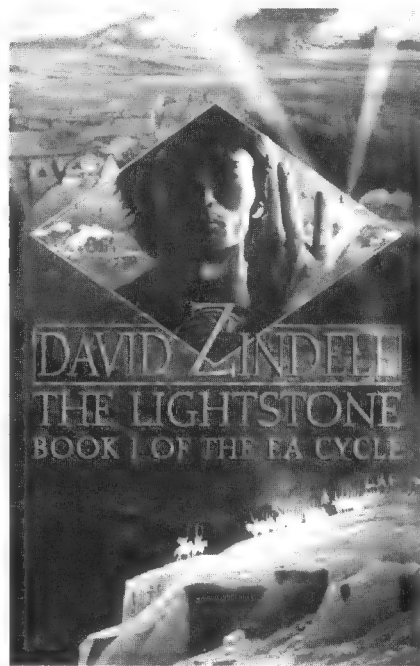
The confrontations of epic fantasy only mirror the very great and very real confrontations occurring all around us. Will we finally have the nuclear war that has been threatening for nearly 60 years? Will we surrender to the tyranny of our corporate masters who spend vast sums of money to buy politicians and destroy democracy – thus destroying the will of the people to act together and face the great crises of our times? George W. Bush recently suggested that any action to forestall global warming is “unrealistic.” Unrealistic? It’s as if Sauron and his orcs were at the gates, and the merchant-rulers inside were trying to figure out how to squeeze out more profit from their slaves for a few more hours. Make no mistake, this is true evil, in its modern form. And it must be defeated, even as Hitler and his murderers were defeated. If it’s not, we’ll call forth a nightmare here on earth rather than realizing our deepest dreams. But finding the heroic within ourselves to oppose such evil is a terrifying task, at least for me. So in the end I write these big, heroic epics to give myself courage and hope, and to remind myself that we really are creators of both our hells and our heavens. And, of course, I write in hope of passing the torch on to others, as it was passed to me upon reading

The Odyssey, Parzival and the Mahabharata, to say nothing of *The Lord of the Rings*.

NG: Your writing is consistently poetic, in a decidedly romantic and visionary way. How did your highly distinctive prose style come about?

DZ: I think that any author’s style develops as a solution to the fundamental literary problem: how to say what one wishes to say in the truest and most effective way? Much of what I wish to say has to do with our deepest aspirations and longing for a deeper experience of life. This requires looking beneath the surfaces of the phenomenal world to the deeper reality that lies within. But how does one do this, through the lens of mere words? I’ve often thought that literature is the most difficult of the arts through which to convey a sense of the transcendent. Both music and painting, for example, open one to more immediate apprehensions of the Good, the Beautiful and the True. All that I have, however, as a writer, is words. Which ones should I choose? If my prose tends toward the poetic, it’s because I’m continually trying to make extensions from this world to the realm that lies beneath and beyond it; in the end, I hope to convey a sense of the interconnectedness, and even identity, of all things. The language of poetry, with its metaphors and similes, is precisely that which connects: ideas to objects, images to emotions, and in some small way, outer events to great, blazing, inner realizations.

NG: In line with what you’ve just said:



from *Neverness* onwards, you’ve evoked, in immense and exceptionally vivid detail, contemplative states of mind – meditative disciplines, openings of portals on to the infinite without and within. What Eastern traditions have you most specifically drawn upon in this? Do your protagonists, in particular Danlo Peacewise and Valashu Elahad, function as exemplars of your own philosophical and spiritual beliefs?

DZ: Ramana Maharshi, as the great, modern light of Advaita Vedanta, has been a huge personal influence. But strangely, he mostly eschewed the more traditional meditative traditions that have a prominent place in my novels for the more simple and pure practice of what he called Self-inquiry. This is basically the process of asking, “Who am I?” and then discovering that the “I” who asks this question is ultimately a deeper self that is pure consciousness – the same consciousness that is the source and essence of all things and their true reality. Strangely, too, I was led to Ramana Maharshi and the eastern traditions in general through two very Western authors: Somerset Maugham and Hermann Hesse. Maugham’s *The Razor’s Edge* had much inspiration in Ramana Maharshi; Hesse, I think, looked to the East as much as he did to the contemplative traditions closer to home, such as those of Meister Eckhart and Saint Teresa of Avila. But he was quite capable of synthesizing all that he knew into the highly original and amazing *The Glass Bead Game*. Certainly the Order of the Neverness novels takes more from Hesse’s *Castalia* than it does the forest academies or ashrams of India.

As for a general theory undergirding my books, which essentially explore the connection between mysticism and evolution: Plotinus’s Great Chain of Being, and its modern elaboration through Aurobindo and Ken Wilber, has been key. I’ve also drawn upon such mavericks as Timothy Leary: what is the remembrancer’s drug of *Requiem*, after all, if not a very powerful and very specific psychedelic? All of this, of course, has in some way been an influence on both Danlo and Valashu. They are exemplars of my spiritual beliefs in the sense that they both set out on heroic journeys in order to gain a higher and deeper level of being for the sake of the worlds in which they live. But even more, they are sharers of the great and defining mystical experiences of my life. In the end, it’s not my beliefs that I would wish to convey to my readers but simply the incredible possibilities of life lived to its infinite depths, in all its terrible and beautiful glory.

NG: In the Neverness cycle, you convey, even to people of an entirely non-mathematical bent, the ecstasy of numbers – “the number storm,” the pure joy of the theorem. What role has your training as a mathematician played in your creative development and technique?

DZ: It was my mathematical development, as much as the mystical, that first alerted me to the existence of another world. Now, I wouldn't say that mathematics has the same degree of intense reality as the world as perceived through the eye of meditation or Self-inquiry, but it is its own fantastic construction, existing in the Platonic realm of the Ideal. To understand very much of it, and even to perceive it, requires the continual opening of the eye of Reason, which we all possess. Few people, though, care to accomplish this opening process, because learning mathematics is a lot of very hard work. So it's almost impossible for most people to appreciate that mathematics can be so strangely and breathtakingly beautiful. When I began writing *Neverness*, I realized that in order to show the pilots of the Order as having their beings steeped in the strangeness of this otherworld, I was going to have to call upon, and try to convey, this secret beauty. It was a daunting task, to say the least. It was the first time that I intensely employed a poetic language, with all its metaphors, to try to describe something that is very nearly ineffable. This, of course, led me to think that I might possibly attempt the description of the more transcendent mystical apprehensions, which many believe really are ineffable.

NG: In the Neverness quartet, what motivated your move from Mallory Ringess to his son Danlo as principal character (even though Mallory remains the narrator)? Why your shift from a complicated, conflicted hero to a saint, a superhuman paragon?

DZ: At the end of *Neverness*, Mallory Ringess undergoes an apotheosis, so I felt that his development and usefulness as a character, especially as a protagonist, were finished. There is simply not that much that can be done with a man who has transcended his all-too-human foibles, to say nothing of shuffling off his mortal coil, so to speak. And, to be truthful, when I began writing *Neverness* and for some time after, I had no intention of writing a sequel. But then it occurred to me that there was another story – and a very large story at that – as to what happens in the Neverness universe after Mallory attains to the godly. I

never state explicitly the nature of his transcendence, but it's quite clear that with all these nano-computers replacing parts of his brain, he is becoming something more than human in form and possibly in function. But I was never quite at ease with that as a model for human possibilities; in fact, it repulses me – as do parts of Mallory himself. And so one day it suddenly came to me that I could write the story of his son, who experiences an even greater transcendence – the greatest that I could imagine – all the while retaining his humanity in the perfect immanence of his human form. So it was only natural that Danlo should wind up being very different from his father. To be blunt, Mallory was simply not worthy of Danlo's marvellous fate; it really was necessary, I think, for Danlo to be something of a saint to achieve what he did.

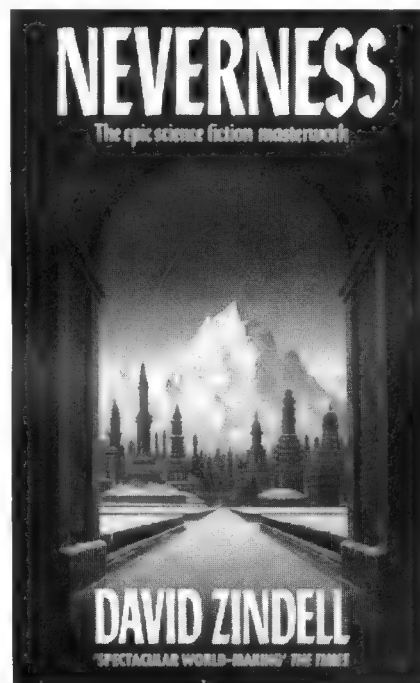
NG: When I read *War in Heaven*, I felt that you had perhaps lost some of your interest in the huge, space-operatic struggle in the background, not for example bringing the subplot regarding Bertram Jaspari and his genocidal Iviomils to a very resounding or detailed conclusion. Instead, you concentrated on Danlo's maturation through icy ordeals in and around Neverness. This is your preferred emphasis, isn't it – not external detail (although you do that very well too), but the extremity and intimacy of a character's inner growth?

DZ: Well, I'm embarrassed to say that you've uncovered an essential flaw in the way that *A Requiem for Homo Sapiens* was structured. I tried to do at least two very ambitious things

with the trilogy that as far as I knew had never been attempted. The first was to write three novels, each of a different type and feel. *The Broken God* was to be somewhat of a Bildungsroman: the story of Danlo's coming of age and education. *The Wild* was to be a quest novel, while *War in Heaven* was to be the great war story. The second thing I did was to have a semi-divine Mallory narrate the whole shebang; I hoped that this would give new meaning to the term “limited omniscient point of view.” Although Mallory, as a god, had a great knowledge of events occurring in the universe, he had full sight into the mind and soul of Danlo, and no one else. So as Mallory's voice fades into the background, the whole story, except at a few, very key moments, essentially devolves into being told in third person from Danlo's point of view. This works much better in the first two books than in the third. In that book, Danlo, as an ambassador for peace who has taken a vow of *ahimsa*, is pretty much taken out of action in the great battles of the war. I was therefore reduced to having to describe these offstage, as it were. And so it wasn't so much that I lost interest in these space-operatic struggles as it was impossible to make them immediate through Danlo's struggles. Ideally, a character's inner conflicts and realizations should be reflected and resolved in outward actions as dramatically as possible. To accomplish this in *War in Heaven*, I had to choose that part of the war – mostly Danlo's battle with Hanuman – that occurred in and around the city of Neverness. And so that meant, to some extent, abandoning Bertram Jaspari and his insane Iviomils.

NG: Would it be accurate to say that a good deal of the thematic burden of the Neverness novels, especially *The Wild* and *War in Heaven*, is the necessity that we prefer our actual, physical environment over virtual realities, no matter how beguiling?

DZ: I would say that is exactly true. And more, I would say that the so-called virtual realities are misnamed: they should be called something like “simulated experiences.” Because they aren't real, and can never be so, any more than a map can be the territory. And more, for the same reason that a map is necessarily less detailed than the territory that it describes, a virtual reality can only ever be a pale shadow of the real thing. Such constructs might prove amusing, or even useful and illuminating, but how could they ever take the place of the essential reality that they represent?



NG: You've now, after a long immersion in visionary space opera, moved on to the extended quest fantasy. *The Lightstone* has obvious affinities with your earlier work, but there are critical differences too; how have the two experiences contrasted – writing sf and writing fantasy?

DZ: In many ways the kind of science fiction that I've written is very close to fantasy: far future, space-operatic, heroic, epic, quest-oriented and requiring a great deal of world-building and invention with a fantastic feel to it. That having been said, I have to admit that in one way, science fiction has been much harder for me to write. At its best, sf would demand all that's best of literature, in terms of character, setting, plot, theme, etc. – and in addition, it would work in science and scientific ideas gracefully and seamlessly. As well, in works that take place in the future, there is the necessity of extrapolating and creating believable sciences and societies, and of course, doing the immense amount of research to make all this come together. It has been the hardest thing I've ever done. Writing fantasy, by contrast, has been for me much more of a natural and organic experience. I've felt as if I've touched something very deep and ancient in the human soul and been swept away to the realm of pure Story. It's been, quite simply, much more fun. And in one strange way, it has been even harder: I've been so juiced by writing *The Lightstone*, so absorbed into the story, that each of my writing sessions has been very intense, almost more like an athletic or musical performance for which I have to psych myself up. At times, as after a battle scene, I've found myself typing furiously, with pounding heart and drenched in sweat. As *The Lightstone* is a very long book, and there have been many of these scenes and sessions, the whole process has been arduous. At times, I've written without a break for as long as two months without taking a day off. And so I've had to subject myself to a greater discipline than I've ever known and arrange my outer life as strictly as possible to serve my writing.

NG: Those who look for material linkages, however tenuous, between an author's different opuses (*à la* the connections between Asimov's Foundation and Robot sequences) may seize on the Ieldra, those luminous predecessors of humanity, as a common presence in the Neverness and Ea Cycles. Do you intend any physical overlap between the series?

DZ: Not at this time. The Ea universe, Eluru, is one ordered by magic, or

rather a science of the gelstei crystals, mysticism and human potentials that looks very much like magic. It's a universe very like ours, but very different as well. For example, in Eluru, human beings have evolved as they have in our universe – but on millions of worlds, simultaneously, by the design of the One. And there has been a Big Bang to kick everything off. But this has been the result of a host of gods – I call them Galadin or angels – in another universe exploding their bodies into light and transcending themselves as the Ieldra of the new universe. Now, it's hard to see how evolution by grand design, without natural selection, and such a miraculous creation can easily be reconciled with modern Darwinian and physical theories. (Though the creation through angel fire, so to speak, might just possibly be supported by the inflation models.) So it's hard to see how there can be an actual physical overlap between the two universes. I am, though, certainly interested in playing with thematic overlaps and resonances. And there is definitely a sense in which Eluru and our universe have emerged out of the same greater cosmos, and have evolved in different, if weirdly parallel, directions.

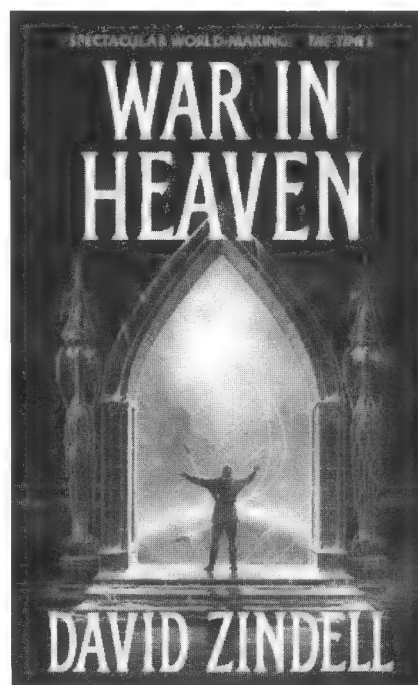
NG: Indeed so: at various points in *The Lightstone*, you strike overt echoes off recorded myth, legend, history. There's the Lightstone as Holy Grail; there's Angra Mainyu (Ahri-man), Morjin's mentor as Dark Lord; there are "Aryans" as conquerors in the historical background; there's the Lady of the Lake handing Valashu Elahad Excalibur, I mean Alkaladur. How systematically will the Ea Cycle

recapitulate the mythic foundations of the "real world"?

DZ: I'm aiming here at less a systematic recapitulation than a resonance between the two universes. The effect for which I'm striving is that Ea, the key world of the Eluran universe, is more ancient than ours and is in some strange and vital way the "real world." There is a sense that much of what has occurred in the Eaeon world has been communicated imperfectly to ours and been recorded primarily as myth. Of course, Tolkien does something very similar in his cosmology: the mythical world of Arda gradually loses its magic as the elves fade and diminish, and in the Fourth Age, evolves into the human-ruled world of the earth we know too well. His genius with languages permitted him, without specifically naming figures or places out of myth, to create a very strong feeling that Middle Earth is the more real reality and existed as the homeland of our distant past. But when I say "our," I mean primarily northern and western European, for the root words of his languages, as well as the actual myths that he drew upon, were taken from those places. I haven't Tolkien's facility at making up new languages. And since I'm hoping to create a sort of ur-myth for the entire world, or at least to cast a new light upon it, I've called upon myths from all across the globe to add depth and resonance to my story.

NG: A global emphasis, yes. Your UK publishers are billing *The Lightstone* as "*The Lord of the Rings* meets *Le Morte D'Arthur*." Are Tolkien and Sir Thomas Malory indeed your premier influences in writing the Ea Cycle? Or are there Asian predecessor texts as well, given the Asiatic texture of so many of the names and settings in *The Lightstone*?

DZ: I don't think I've ever told anyone this, but *Le Morte D'Arthur* was actually much more of a direct influence on the Neverness books. In fact, I had originally conceived *Neverness* as a sort of *Morte D'Arthur* in space: Neverness, the city, was Camelot, and the pilots of the Order were to be knights zipping around the universe in search of the Holy Grail: the Elder Eddas. Soli was to be Arthur and Justine Guinevere. As I had originally plotted it, she had a lover in Neville (Lancelot). Moira was something very like Morgan Le Fay. And Mallory was originally named Uella and played the part of Modred. Somewhere along the way, I lost Neville, and decided that Uella would be much more interesting as a protagonist who tells a story in which he overcomes his evil side even-



tually to do great good. I don't recall how he came to be Mallory. And then things evolved from there. In the Ea Cycle, Thomas Malory's influence isn't nearly as great as Tolkien's. Asian predecessors include the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, but more as sources very much in the background. From western Asia, of course, I've drawn upon the *Epic of Kalkamash* – I mean, *Gilgamesh*. I've been inspired by many Hindu and Buddhist myths (Kalkin is the tenth and final avatar of Vishnu as the Maitreya is the last earthly buddha); I'll probably wind up using myths from China and Japan, but at this time, I have great ignorance of them.

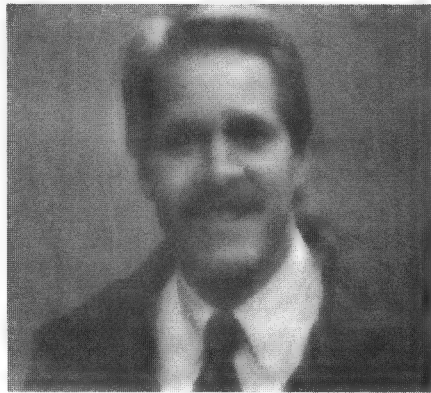
NG: Is Valashu Elahad essentially a second Danlo, with similar attitudes and aptitudes? Is his friend, Maram, another Bardo, and his enemy, Morjin, another Hanuman?

DZ: One of the resonances between our universe and Eluru is that of incarnation. And so, yes, Maram is very nearly Bardo, while Valashu is somewhat less a Danlo. And least of all is Morjin another Hanuman – though enough so that there are many similarities.

NG: A particularly fascinating component of the Ea Cycle is its background

of space travel in the distant past, and a prophesied return to the stars. What form does interstellar transportation take in a fantasy universe?

DZ: Certainly not through spaceships – although there is a hint, in the tale of King Koru-ki, that the oceans of all Eluru's worlds are somehow connected and so it might be possible to sail from one world to another. It is the case that the telluric currents of all worlds touch upon every other and so open portals to other worlds through which various creatures and peoples pass back and forth. This winds up being, functionally, no different from the star gates of science fiction. The Galadin, I should say, possess a slightly different means of walking between worlds, but



I don't think I want to say much more about this at this early stage of the Ea Cycle's genesis.

NG: Have you fully plotted out the titles and content of the remaining three books of Ea as yet? Will there be dramatic changes in period, setting, or the identity of the narrator?

DZ: The titles I've had from the beginning but I expect that they might have to be changed: the second book is *The Red Dragon*, which is perfect but already used by Thomas Harris for one of his Hannibal novels. The narrator will remain Valashu. At this time, I've no plans either to kill him off or divinize him and begin telling the story of his son. The setting will remain on Ea, at the end of the Age of the Dragon. And I have plotted out the remaining books, but only the second one in detail. And as for there being four books altogether, who knows? These series have a way of growing, don't they? But I can say I have no intention of letting it metastasize, of sending my characters off on meaningless side quests or in developing too many subplots and story arcs. One of the constraints of telling a story in first person is that it's very difficult to go off on all these story-wrecking tangents. IZ

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The Puzzle

Zoran Zivkovic

Mr Adam only started to paint late in life, after his retirement. It happened quite unexpectedly. For the first 65 years of his life he had never shown any predisposition towards painting, for which he had neither talent nor interest. The arts in general attracted him very little.

The only exception might have been music, although he didn't really enjoy it. Sometimes he would find a radio station devoted mainly to music and leave it on low, just enough to dispel the silence that surrounded him during his long, dreary hours at work. It didn't matter what sort of music was played; almost any would serve his purpose equally well, although he preferred instrumentals since singing distracted him. All he did at home was sleep, and often not even that, so there was little opportunity for anything else.

Retirement brought Mr Adam an abundance of empty hours which he must fill. Experience gained at work had taught him that whenever he had to wait an indeterminate time for something, he had to impose obligations upon himself, and then discharge them doggedly, regardless of how unusual they might seem. This at least gave a semblance of meaning to everything. And one could not live without some meaning, however illusory.

He set himself one obligation for every day of the week. On Sunday he cooked, something he had never done before. He bought the biggest cookbook he could find in the book store and set himself to prepare every dish in it, in alphabetical order. The uncertainty of how far he dared hope to get at this tempo did not disturb him. He was aware that he would require extreme longevity to reach the end of the book, but that was of no importance to him.

He followed the instructions for each recipe to the let-

ter, and the only trouble he encountered was when they were not specific enough, but allowed the cook to use his own judgment or taste. He did not like everything he cooked, but that did not bother him greatly. He ate his culinary creations down to the last spoonful, throwing nothing away. This was almost a matter of honour to him. Sometimes, when the recipe was intended for several people, he ate the same food the whole week.

On Monday Mr Adam rode his bicycle. This was also a new departure. He learned how to ride easily and quite rapidly, despite his advanced age. He was not deterred by bad weather, though he would dress accordingly. The only trouble he had was when the rain sprinkled his glasses, unpleasantly fogging his vision. He preferred to ride without glasses in a downpour, though that rendered his vision equally foggy.

He always took the same route, each time increasing the distance a little. He tried to conserve his strength so he had enough to go back by bike. He was only forced to return by other means of transport on the few occasions when there was a sudden turn in the weather, or he was overcome by fatigue. His conscience always plagued him when he gave up like that.

Unlike cooking, cycling had its limits. The route he took never actually ended, since it connected to many others, but even if he were to ride the whole day without stopping, which was not very likely, at midnight he would be required to stop. Tuesday was not for bike-riding, but imposed its own obligation.

While still employed, he had read very little except professional journals. Not because there was no opportunity – many of his colleagues read for pleasure to pass the

time at work – but because it seemed to him a sign of insufficient dedication to the job. Of course, his work would not have suffered for it, particularly since computers had taken over the bulk of his responsibilities. Now he decided to make up at least partially for this lapse. He became a member of the town library and went there every Tuesday. He entered as soon as it opened and stayed until it closed, only taking a short break early in the afternoon to eat something.

His initial subject was science fiction. This was a natural choice, but Mr Adam soon gave it up. What he read about First Contact seemed unsophisticated for the most part, often to the point of inanity – pulled out of thin air, at best. The number of writers demonstrating any knowledge of the real state of things was quite small, though such knowledge was easy enough to obtain. Disappointed, he was briefly tempted to give up reading entirely. But giving way before an obstacle was not in his nature, and besides, he had paid his dues a year in advance. Finally, were he to stop going to the library he would have to think up a new obligation for Tuesday, and that prospect did not please him at all.

He found a solution to this problem, using the same means he had often resorted to at work. Whenever his search in one area drew a blank, he simply broadened his field of vision. Not knowing what else to choose, this time he broadened the field to the farthest limit, like suddenly taking the whole sky instead of one small sector. Instead of science fiction he chose literature in its entirety, but as this turned out to be far greater even than the cookbook, at first he had no idea where to begin.

The main catalogue was indexed by author, and he briefly considered adopting that order. But then he thought again, and concluded that this would not be a good approach. He spent some time at the library computer, classifying titles by publication date, and finally obtained a list of books from oldest to most recent. The scale of this list did not discourage him at all – he had become accustomed to such challenges long ago. He started to read steadily, without rushing, as if all the time in the world lay before him.

On Wednesdays Mr Adam went to the zoo. The middle of the week was the right time to visit – there were far fewer visitors than at weekends. Moreover, if the weather was bad, he would often see no one near him for long periods. That suited him best. Ideally he would have liked to be completely alone at the zoo, but of course, he was never able to count on that.

Mr Adam did not behave like the ordinary sort of visitor, who just wanders around enjoying himself. First he found out which animals were housed in the zoo, then he drew up a schedule of visits. Each animal was allotted a whole day. Few of the zoo's inhabitants were worthy of such dedication, but the systematic patience with which Mr Adam approached everything did not allow him to act otherwise.

He would arrive in the morning at the chosen cage and sit in front of it. When there was no bench he brought a small folding chair from home. He would stay in that spot

until nightfall, doing nothing but observe the animal carefully through the bars. He did not know exactly what to expect. Certainly nothing special. What he hoped for was at least a certain reaction to his presence, just an awareness that he was there, perhaps a glance that deliberately crossed his own. Anything short of complete disregard.

It was actually quite easy to attract the animals' attention by offering them food, but Mr Adam never did. It would be a form of cheating, and he would brook no cheating. Therefore he took no food with him, not even for himself. When he left the zoo on a Wednesday evening, he was often faint with hunger.

On Thursdays Mr Adam visited churches. Not being religious, he had never been to such places before, and was surprised to learn that the town held 16 of them. Sometimes he had to walk the whole day in order to take them all in. He could have used public transport, of course, which would have speeded things up considerably, but that would have run contrary to Mr Adam's basic intention. His Monday bike ride was by no means sufficient to keep him in shape, and his need for additional exercise was the more acute after spending all Wednesday sitting still at the zoo. What could be more appropriate than a seriously long walk?

In order to avoid the tedium of repeating the same walk every time, Mr Adam took a different route every Thursday. This was not done at random; he had worked out a precise plan. He approached it as a simple problem in combinatorial mathematics. There were far more ways of ordering the 16 points than he imagined he would ever need. The itineraries greatly varied in length, because the algorithm he had chosen took no account of the distance between the churches. He bore up stoically under this inconsiderate mathematical dictate, consoling himself with the reflection that he found longer walks more enjoyable.

Mr Adam could have visited points other than churches. In principle, the direction of his walks was immaterial to him, so he could not have explained why he had chosen churches. Luckily, no one ever asked him, which saved him from embarrassment. On reaching a church he began by walking all the way round it, examining it inquisitively, as if seeing it for the first time. Then he would take a little rest, sitting in the churchyard if there was one, before continuing on his way.

In time he came to know the exteriors of all 16 churches quite well, and came to regard himself as a real expert in this field. He believed that he alone had noted some of the details. For example, there was always an even number of birds' nests under the eaves. Who knows why? He rarely felt any urge to examine the interiors of the churches. He was only tempted to enter on two or three occasions, but he always refrained, and here again he was unable to say what it was that had dissuaded him.

Friday was his day to go to the movies. Mr Adam would always watch four films in a row, from mid-afternoon to late in the evening. This was by any standard too much. After the second film his impressions were already becoming confused, and by the end of the fourth he would

feel truly exhausted, as though he had been working at some strenuous task, rather than sitting in a comfortable seat the whole time. But this did not prompt him to decrease the number of films.

Mr Adam was not the least bit selective regarding the repertoire. He did not have a favourite film genre, although he felt most relaxed watching romantic comedies. Action films left him rather indifferent, and although they were loud as a rule, he even managed to doze off to them, particularly if they were the last of that day's four. He found thrillers unconvincing, although not as much as most science-fiction films. Those sometimes appeared outrageously idiotic; he could never understand why filmgoers got so excited about them. Overly erotic scenes embarrassed him, but fortunately that was not noticeable in the dark.

Although it might have appeared that Mr Adam chose his films at random, this was not at all the case. He bought his tickets with great care, concentrating on films that were expected to sell out. Just before the lights went out, Mr Adam would stand up for a moment and look all around. He would feel annoyed should he spot any empty seats. Those empty places would pester him until the end of the show. He only felt at ease in a completely full theatre. That alone could temporarily lighten the pressure of the solitude which, like some sinister heritage, remained from his former work.

Mr Adam spent Saturday in the park. He needed to spend time outside in the fresh air after so many hours inside the previous day. Late in the morning he would go to the large city park with its pond in the middle, and head for the bench where he always sat. On the rare occasions when someone was already sitting on the place he considered his own, on the far left end of the bench next to the wrought-iron armrest, Mr Adam would wait unobtrusively to one side for the bench to come free. It did not bother him if the rest of the bench was occupied, though he avoided entering into conversation with strangers.

On warm, sunny days he would stay there until dusk, doing nothing but idly watching what was happening around him: people strolling by, dogs chasing each other frantically on the grass, leaves rustling in the surrounding treetops, birds gliding silently through the blue sky, sudden ripples on the smooth surface of the pond. Until recently this idleness would have seemed an extremely foolish waste of time. Now, however, the tables were turned. He saw everything before as a waste of time. All his previous life. All the years, all the effort, all the hopes.

That was not how it had appeared, at least not in the beginning. Not at all. It was a pioneering time of great excitement. Great expectations. And great naïveté. They thought that contact was only a matter of time. The cosmos was teeming with life, messages were streaming between worlds, all that was needed was to prick up our electronic ears to hear them. Without this optimistic certainty the money for the first projects would never have been found – investments that could pay off stupendously as soon as the inexhaustible treasury of knowledge started to pour in from the stars.

Mr Adam had fond memories of those early days, despite later disappointments. There was something romantic in the anticipation that overcame him whenever he put on his earphones. He spent countless hours listening to the cacophony pouring from the skies, straining to recognize some sort of orderly system in it. Like all of his colleagues, he secretly hoped that he would be the first to hear the signal.

But as time passed and nothing arrived except inarticulate noise, the true proportions of the task started to emerge. Since listening to the closest star systems produced no results, there was a shift to more distant ones, but each new step brought a substantial increase in their number. The initial enthusiasm foundered when it was established that more than one generation might be needed to complete the task. This led many people to leave the search for extraterrestrial life in favour of more promising areas, and financiers were less and less willing to continue investing in something so uncertain and unreliable.

Fortunately, at that point computers were introduced, with their numerous advantages over people: they are incomparably faster, more effective and reliable, and do not quickly lose heart in the face of failure. Even so, Mr Adam did not look upon their use with total approval. Computers reduced people to commonplace assistants, only there to serve them. What had begun as a noble project for the chosen few degenerated into a routine technical duty that almost anyone could do – mere waiting, leached of any true excitement. The last remnants of romanticism disappeared without a trace.

After several decades passed, and the computers had meticulously checked many millions of sun systems but detected no sign of extraterrestrial intelligence, Mr Adam felt a certain gloomy exultation. His feelings were paradoxical, because only the opposite case, with contact made, would enable him to say that his life's work had meaning. On the other hand, contact reached with the aid of computers would be some sort of injustice to him, almost an anticlimax.

Despite the silence of the cosmos, the search programs were not discontinued. Although large, the number of investigated stars was a trifle compared to the total number of suns in the galaxy. In principle, one of the giant radio telescopes could start receiving the long-awaited message from the very next spot in the sky. However, as his retirement approached, Mr Adam became more and more sceptical in this regard.

It was not just the realization that the prospects of finding Others within his lifetime were negligible; he could somehow reconcile himself to that if he was sure they were on the right track. But the suspicion started to trouble him that the reason for failure lay not in the fact that only a tiny part of the sky had been investigated, rather in something much more fundamental. What if some of the basic assumptions upon which the entire project was founded were wrong?

Maybe there was no one out there after all. Maybe sentient beings were so unlikely that they had only appeared in one place. Everyone was convinced of the opposite, but this conviction had no solid basis. Behind it might lie an

unwillingness to accept the terrifying fact of cosmic solitude. As the years passed, Mr Adam started to feel anxious under the unbounded wasteland. The starry sky pressed heavily upon him at times. The strange need arose for some sort of shelter, for consolation.

Suppose extraterrestrials exist and are communicating, but we don't recognize it? What if they were doing it in some other way, and not the way we presumed? Mr Adam had never asked himself this question seriously. Whenever it stole quietly into his consciousness he would expel it hurriedly, with a feeling of hostility and guilt, as any true believer rejects a heretical thought. All his sober, scientific being opposed it. Similar inconsistencies had prevented him from coming to like science fiction.

He still considered this the proper approach, for all the unfulfilled hopes in the life that yawned behind him. And finally, what other means besides electromagnetic waves could be used to communicate between the stars? With regard to his past, the daily obligations he set himself helped put it out of his mind. Perhaps these obligations really were meaningless, but the problem of meaning no longer plagued him. He enjoyed everything he was doing now, even idling in the park every Saturday, and that pleasure was all that mattered. In any case, he was not just idly passing the time. He had recently started to paint.

Music had been the catalyst. Upon reaching the park one Saturday at the beginning of summer, he found that a bandstand had been erected near his bench. It had not been there seven days previously, nor had anything heralded its advent. This had irritated Mr Adam no end. Although pretty, with its slender columns and domed roof, he considered it an unconscionable desecration of the environment. In addition, the bandstand largely blocked his view of the pond, and he seriously considered looking for another place to sit. But habit won out and he stayed on his bench, scornfully endeavouring to disregard the interloper.

This ceased to be possible when musicians climbed onto the bandstand at noon. They were formally dressed and the conductor even wore a tuxedo with a large white flower in his lapel. They sat on chairs placed in a circle and spent some time tuning their instruments. Mr Adam found this dissonance an additional nuisance. It not only sounded awful but started to attract park visitors, and rather a large crowd soon formed. A crowd of people, however, was the last thing Mr Adam wanted after his Friday spent in a completely packed movie theatre.

He would have to move after all. He couldn't stand this. But just as he started to stand up the music began. He stopped halfway, transfixed, and then slowly sat down again on the bench. All at once he was no longer surrounded by too many people, his bad mood disappeared, and nothing existed beyond the music. He stared fixedly at the bandstand, immobile, all ears.

This paralysis did not last long. He came out of it suddenly and began feverishly rummaging through his jacket pockets. It seemed to take far too long to find what he was after. He always carried a notebook and pen with him. Since retirement he had not written anything in it,

but he carried it with him nonetheless. He opened it hurriedly and started to draw. He dared not miss a thing.

He drew short, brusque lines, just like a stenographer taking rapid dictation. The pages in the notebook were small, so he filled them quickly. He was afraid he would run out of pages before the music ended, but fortunately the notebook was thick enough. Even so, he made the last drawing on the brown cardboard covers. Had the music lasted a moment longer, there would not have been enough room. The very thought suddenly filled him with horror.

The listeners' echoing applause after the last chords had the effect of an alarm clock suddenly going off. Mr Adam jerked like one waking from restless sleep; he turned this way and that in confusion for several moments as if trying to figure out where he was. He feared he would arouse the suspicion of those around him, but no one paid any attention to the old man on the end of the bench, engrossed in his writing. All eyes were turned towards the conductor who was bowing theatrically.

Mr Adam stood up and walked away unobtrusively. There was no longer any reason to stay there. During his long walks between the churches he had come to know the town quite well, so he knew exactly where to find a shop with painting supplies. There might have been one closer, but he would waste more time inquiring about it and finding it than it took to reach the other. The salesman noted with a smile that he was clearly preparing a serious project, judging by the amount of material he purchased. Mr Adam returned the smile, mumbled something vague, then hurried home.

Unskilled at painting, he had trouble setting up the easel properly, but then he got down to work. He opened the notebook and began carefully transferring onto the canvas what he had written, as if neatly copying over messy notes taken in a hurry. He worked slowly but with passion, unaware of the passing time. When he finished it was already quite dark.

He did not know what he had painted. Viewed from up close it looked just like random strokes of paint. He was convinced, however, that not a single stroke of the brush had been accidental, that everything was exactly as the music ordered, in spite of his inexperience. When he moved back from the painting a bit, he thought he could make out part of a larger shape, but he wasn't sure. It suddenly crossed his mind that before him was just one piece of some larger puzzle. He thought briefly about what to do with the canvas, and then he hung it unframed on one of the bare walls.

The next Saturday he went to the park well prepared. He no longer needed the notebook as intermediary. He sat at his usual place on the bench and set up the easel in front of him, holding paintbrush and palette. In different circumstances he would have abhorred the inquisitive peering of bystanders, although a painter at work was certainly not unusual in the park. Now, however, he paid no attention, concentrating exclusively on the impending concert.

This time he painted rapidly. It lasted just as long as the music. When the applause resounded, Mr Adam, breathless and sweating, had just finished covering the

last white space with paint. Before the crowd dispersed, several pairs of eyes glanced at the painting, perplexed, since it did not depict anything recognizable. A short elderly woman wearing a bright orange dress stopped by the bench for a moment. She took an enormous pair of glasses out of her handbag and examined first the painting and then the painter. "Very nice," she said with a smile. She put her glasses back in her handbag, nodded in brief approval and walked away.

As a man unaccustomed to compliments, Mr Adam felt ill at ease. The woman's words were by no means unpleasant, quite the contrary, yet he was still glad she had not lingered. He would have been in the awkward situation of having to say something in return. He waited a bit for the elderly woman to move on, then collected his equipment and hurried home. He could have stayed in the park some more, his work was completed and the day was very nice, but curiosity got the better of him.

He put the new canvas next to the other one on the wall. He had no expectations and thus was not very disappointed when it turned out they had no points in common. For a moment, though, he thought he could make out some part of a greater whole in the second painting, too, but here again it was most likely just his imagination. In the absence of any recognizable form he thought he saw something that was actually not there. This was a trap he had learned to stay away from back in the early period, before computers, while listening to the stars with his own ears. If you're expecting a horseman you have to be very careful not to mistake your heartbeat for the beat of a horse's hoofs.

The next 14 Saturdays, all summer long, each time Mr Adam returned from the park he had one more painting to place on the wall next to the others. In time his brisk, almost frenetic painting became something of an attraction at the park, and a good many music-lovers would stand around to watch him work. He paid no attention to them. At the end of the music and painting he would quickly glance through those gathered around him, but never once did he catch sight of the slight figure in orange.

When Mr Adam reached the park on the first Saturday in September, carrying his painting materials as usual, a surprise awaited him. The bandstand had disappeared as unexpectedly as it had arrived. It had been removed very carefully, leaving no trace behind – not even trampled grass. He darted in bewilderment around the spot where the little structure had stood, overcome by completely opposite feelings from those at the beginning. Now he missed the bandstand, and the environment seemed somehow naked and incomplete without it. For a moment he considered inquiring as to why it was no longer there, maybe even lodging a complaint, but he did not know where this should be done and in the end dropped the idea.

He returned home in a dejected mood and sat in the armchair facing the wall covered with paintings. The canvases formed a large square: four paintings in four rows. He stayed there for seven full days, only leaving the armchair to eat something quickly or go to the bathroom. He even slept there in his clothes, but the brief, restless,

erratic sleep did not refresh him. He changed the distribution of the paintings from time to time. During that long week filled with almost constant pouring rain, he tried all possible combinations of the 16 canvases.

On the evening of the following Saturday he got up from the armchair, stretched, and went to the window. Rays from the low sun in the western sky were cutting a path through patchy clouds, just like gleaming swords. He stayed there a while looking absently at the flickering play of light. Then he went to the wall and took down the paintings. He couldn't carry them all at once and had to make two trips to the basement where he left them.

When he came up from the basement the second time, he went to the kitchen, took the large cookbook down from the shelf, opened it to the bookmark and became immersed in reading the recipe that was next in line. The following day was Sunday, his cooking day.

Translated from the Serbian by Alice Copple-Tosic

Translation edited by Christopher Gilmore

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Zoran Zivkovic lives in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and is now *Interzone's* most frequently-published foreign-language contributor. The above new piece is the fifth in a cycle of subtly interconnected fantasies – to be called *Seven Touches of Music*. The stories may be read in any order.

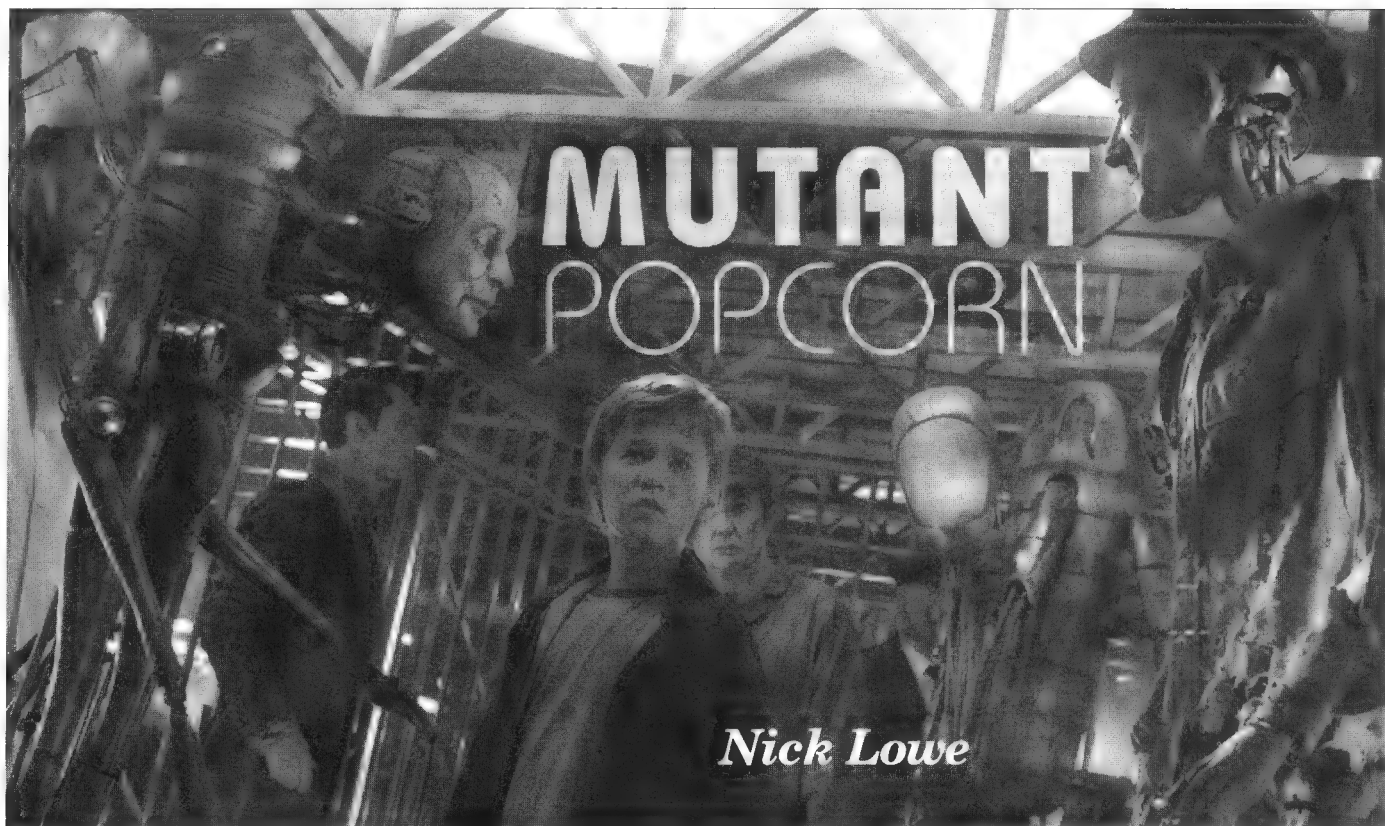
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Sir, you'd better see this. We fished it out of the ice near Luton VIIa a couple of months back, and our technicians have had it on the slab trying to figure out how it functioned. We're now sure it's a late-model human memetic product of the kind known as motion pictures, and our archeo droids got pretty excited when they identified it as the long-lost *AI: Artificial Intelligence* – the movie that many have suspected to hold the key to the mystery of whether humans were truly intelligent and capable of emotion. We've long known that the humans used to build these vastly expensive artificial creations endowed with simulated emotion as consolations in their inadequacy, immortal unchanging expressions of their own failure to love which have long outlived their creators. But *AI* is the one that tells its story as it happened: the epic story of a juvenile meme's quest to become real enough to fulfil its need for love.

We already knew a lot from the humans' own records about the story behind *AI*. No sf film ever had such a bizarre and tortuous development, sucking in not only the two biggest names in sf cinema history but an epic succession of creative collaborators from in and around the UK sf scene. Both Brian Aldiss and Ian Watson wrote up their own roles in the project in some detail, and we've been able to excavate most of the main memetic strata. But even with all this known, we at first had trouble making any kind of sense of the actual film we'd found, until it hit us that the humans

had programmed their creation with the key to its own decoding. There are a couple of throwaways in this movie so brilliant that their survival into the Spielberg screenplay is utterly inexplicable except as a cunningly-planted clue. Both, as it happens, bear the pretty unmistakable fingerprints of Watson, whose full-length outline came closer than anything else in Kubrick's lifetime to wringing a coherent narrative out of the sage of Childwickbury's quite literally interminable doodlings.

The first comes at the film's lowest plot point, when Jude Law's Gigolo Joe abruptly asks, "What if the Blue Fairy is a parasite that has arisen to inhabit the minds of artificial intelligence?" – a

clear reference to the way the memetic virus of the Blue Fairy out of *Pinocchio* infected Kubrick's conception of how Aldiss's original story should develop. Aldiss made no secret of his fundamental disagreement with the direction in which Kubrick wanted to take his original 1969 story "Supertoys Last All Summer Long." He was intrigued enough to go along with Kubrick's ambition to extend what began as a poignant vignette of inability-to-love into a vast epic of humanity's failure, out of which the pair conjured (among much else) the memorable vistas of a drowned Manhattan that survive as one of the great images of Spielberg's film. But a gap opened up with Kubrick's obsession with the *Pinocchio* plot as a template for the storyline of David's quest from the point where "Supertoys" left off – a line of development which Aldiss tried hard to love, but whose fairytale arc was fatally at odds with the humanistic thrust of Aldiss's story. After Kubrick's death, Aldiss fascinatingly wrote up his own sense of where the story should have gone, in the form of two Supertoys sequels of which the first especially knocks spots off anything in Spielberg. But by that time *AI* had long since run off into the woods in search of the its private fairytale, and wasn't about to come back.

The second giveaway Watson gem is the glorious, if somewhat garbled, mind-boggler in the angel droids' explanation of why bimillennial boy David's aeons-lost Mom can't be resurrected for more than a day: "The very fabric of spacetime itself appeared to store infor-



mation about every event that had taken place within it." It took us a while to figure out what we were being told here, until we realized that the final film bears the memory traces of *all its previous versions*, if – and then selling Spielberg the rights to the unnecessarily fine story that emerged). This key moment, pivotal in both Aldiss and Spielberg though the consequences are almost exactly opposite, centres around a master shot of a row of identical boxed Davids, each with the legend "At Last – A Love of Your Own". Given that this is the moment when David is confronted with the final proof that he's a mass-production Supertoy model, it's particularly unfortunate that the line of identicesign space, a warehouse for Kubrick's cabinets full of Fangorn artwork, in which all that actually happens is that (a new low in screenwriting desperation) our heroes are reduced to interrogating a search engine for any clue as to where the plot should go, something they might as easily have done at a roadside booth.

Kubrick's big mistake was never developing his vision as far as an actual screenplay, leaving Spielberg the task for which he was least qualified: turning Kubrick's nuts and bolts into an emotionally credible script that could talk, reason, and pass among humanity. To make it harder, *AI* was always conceived as the most extreme of Kubrick's wargames with film structure, defying all orthodoxies of film form to mutate without warning into an unrecognizably different film not once but three times over; and the junctures are quite beyond Spielberg's power to fix. "I'm sorry I never told you about the world," is all Mom says as she abandons David on the edge of a new film entirely, and as an afterthought, "Stay away from flesh fairs"; while for sheer disjunctness even this is beaten by the transitions between the flesh fair and Rouge City ("We will ask Dr Know. There is nothing he doesn't"), between Dr Know's plot clinic and drowned Radio City (not the most obvious place for William Hurt's droid shop to set up HQ), and especially between Coney Island and the far future ("Thus two thousand years passed by" – *not* a voiceover line you hear every day).

But Spielberg worked every bit as fast as Stanley didn't, and there are howling bloopers in the finished edit that must have had Stan's mortal remains spinning like a powerdrill. The single most famous episode in the post-Kubrick phase of the story development is Spielberg's attempt to buy the rights to a solitary key sentence in a letter from Aldiss (a negotiation eventually resolved by Aldiss' writing his final Supertoys story around the

idea – David is freaked out by the discovery of a warehouse full of ready-to-ship versions of himself – and then selling Spielberg the rights to the unnecessarily fine story that emerged). This key moment, pivotal in both Aldiss and Spielberg though the consequences are almost exactly opposite, centres around a master shot of a row of identical boxed Davids, each with the legend "At Last – A Love of Your Own". Given that this is the moment when David is confronted with the final proof that he's a mass-production Supertoy model, it's particularly unfortunate that the line of identical Supertoy boxes are very noticeably not identical at all: thanks to a continuity gaffe rivalling the wristwatch in *Spartacus*, the one closest to the camera has something very obvious missing. Nor is it an isolated instance, coming mere minutes after Jude Law has read out on the soundtrack a version of the "Come away" *Pinocchio* doggerel that doesn't actually match the text on the screen he's supposed to be reading off.

For, sad to say, the lesson of *AI* is that, while Kubrick and Spielberg can do what they like with the work they buy in from the cream of hired-and-fired writers and conceptual artists, *nobody* tells the world's greatest living director his handiwork has holes you could pilot a minisub through. This has catastrophic results for the film's best and most important idea, the one that for Kubrick was the whole point of the film: that man-made self-replicating intelligences will inevitably outlive the

human race, and that sooner or later (in *AI*, all too soon) humanity is fated to bequeath a dead earth to android archaeologists for whom organic intelligence is a distant memory. This idea, brilliantly fleshed out by Watson in the breathtaking final section where we suddenly cut forward two millennia to a glaciated post-human earth, is arguably the one concept in all sf cinema as big and bold as the revelation in *2001*. But unless you know in advance that the shiny machine-gods of the final act are supposed to be late products of terrestrial android evolution, it's practically impossible to work this out from the elliptical hints in Spielberg's dialogue, and everyone naturally assumes from the *CE3K* homologues that they're just alien exobiologists arriving on the scene just a little too late, like 18th-century ornithologists looking for Moas.

So near is this final act to absolutely awe-striking, jaw-socking greatness that the shock of its collision with the limitations of Spielberg's vision and talent feels like a bus hitting a bridge. The kindest reading of the final scenes would have to stress the ironic gap between the cloying infantile sentimentality on the surface and the grim inadequacy of the sequence as any kind of real resolution. David's one day of fulfilment as a loving boy is a literally ephemeral, synthetic reality, his briefly-reconstituted Mommy as much a Supertoy substitute in his own grieving as he was created to be in hers: designed only to love and be loved, without the messy complications of full humanity. "All the problems seemed to have disappeared from his Mommy's mind. There was no Henry; there was no Martin; there would be no grief." How willing one is to take this depends largely on one's readiness to look beyond what David sees of this scene to the darker, colder world that awaits him in the morning: a world in which his need for love will be farther than ever from fulfilment. It's not at all impossible that Spielberg was alert to that level of response, but it has to be admitted that nothing in the ending as actually shot gives us any cues whatever to look beyond it in this way.

As a film about AI, it does make an undeniable contribution to the admittedly limited cinema of classical sf robotology, developing with some sensitivity Aldiss's speculation about what an unchanging, forever emotionally-immature synthetic child might actually be like, and with as good a performance as anyone could wish from the world's top child actor under the world's top director of kids. But there's disappointingly little attempt to engage with the central metaphysi-



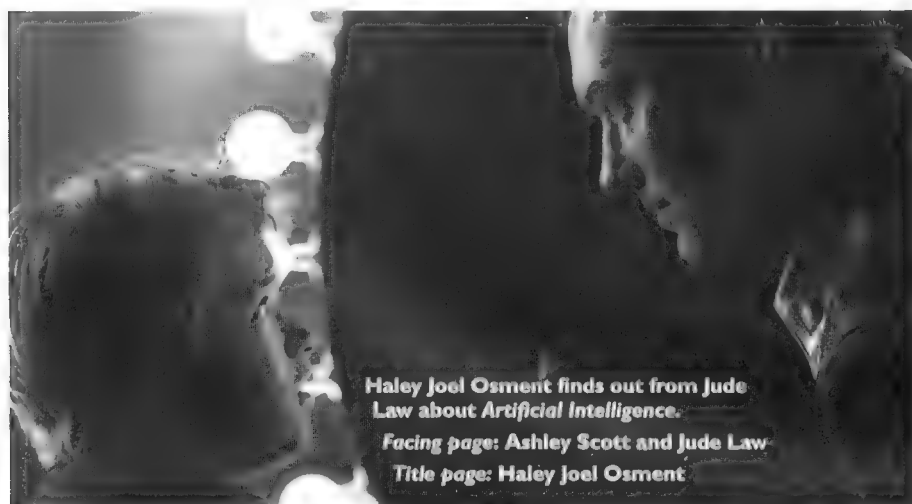
cal problem of android humanity, and none of Aldiss's delicate problematization of the limitations of Supertoy consciousness; if David can love, we're expected to accept him as human, if a little strange, so that the Robot Wars scene becomes merely a banal gladiatorial atrocity. There's no denying the manipulative power of much of the first and last acts, but the one major scene to survive from the original "Supertoys" – the crayon scene, brilliantly affecting in the 1969 story – is now somewhat at odds with the reconstruction of David's mindset. And there are so many things that don't make

emotional sense at all, particularly in the places where Aldiss' uncannily powerful story is reframed. Could a grieving parent be healed by adopting a surrogate, as though a lost child were as replaceable as a dead pet? What rational, feeling creature would programme an immortal being to love a mortal one without providing an off switch? Could anyone believe that a scary laugh at the dinner table would be sufficient to trigger the will to love? Is it really credible that David's obsession with the Blue Fairy would override his need to seek out his lost Mommy? Would any human female

ever want to be pleased by an android, even an android Jude?

So we reckon the film is a kind of self-administered Turing test set by the human race to probe their own ability to attribute intelligence correctly. On the face of it, the progressive descent into associative plotting, fairytale intertext, and bedtime-narrator voiceover reads like a regression beyond cinema itself to an infantile state of dreaming, culminating in an astonishing primal narrative moment in which all the irreversible processes of life are reversed: death is cancelled, dreams come true, toys become people, and lost love impossibly resurrected, in a final reunion of the subject and the function of the mother. It's easy enough to write this stuff off as drooling, manipulative nonsense, Spielberg's revenge on the guffawing test audiences that forced the excision of the Pinocchio theme song from the climax of *Close Encounters*. But the eerie thing is that, merely by being blown up this large, and by taking the trouble to be boring and slow in the way that great films used to be, its dreams of grandeur begin to seem real. Certainly artfilm logic and incoherent infantile drivel have never seemed more alike, and blow my gaskets if I can tell them apart. More spinach, sir?

Nick Lowe



Haley Joel Osment finds out from Jude Law about Artificial Intelligence.
Facing page: Ashley Scott and Jude Law
Title page: Haley Joel Osment

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Watch Me When I Sleep

Jean-Claude Dunyach

I swallowed my fairy when I was twelve years old. It was an accident. It was too hot to watch the goats and I fell asleep at the edge of the rushing stream, my head on a piece of sun-warmed shale. I guess my mouth was open – I do snore sometimes. And I was dreaming. Fairies can hear unspoken wishes, desires and curses, but dreams attract them more than anything else.

I felt her slip between my lips, the cutting edge of her wings slicing my tongue. I bit down, by reflex, but it was too late. My cry frightened the herd. My mouth sticky with blood, I called my dog to help me bring back the goats. I drank the icy water that raced down from the mountains until my teeth ached.

As I walked back along the rushing stream to the farm, I felt the fairy gently tickle my innards. She was preparing her nest in the acid cavity of my stomach. Somehow, none of this frightened me.

My father's anger did, though.

I prepared the meal – my mother died giving birth to me and my aunt has difficulty walking when it's hot out. So she settles for giving orders and waving her cane about. Since she was never able to have children to pass the farm on to, she's not terribly fond of me. She bombarded me with questions when I came back earlier than expected with the goats still hungry. She shook her head as she examined the cuts on my lips before sending me off to the kitchen.

I heard my father and my uncle come in from the fields, then my aunt's voice even sharper than usual,

"Your idiot son was sleeping instead of watching the flock. He caught a fairy!"

The kitchen door opened. My uncle held back, supporting his wife against him. My father walked toward me, a leather belt in his hand.

"You'll leave for town this evening," he murmured, looking me straight in the eye. "But before you go, I'll teach you to daydream when there's work to be done!"

He wasn't a bad man. And if it had been just the two of us, his punishment would have been just. I made no effort to get away, even when my aunt started to egg him on in her strident voice. The fairy was starting to secrete her poison in my innards and I didn't really feel his blows. I should have pretended to suffer, I guess, faking pain as in the old stories. But I was too young to know any better.

Since I didn't cry, my uncle joined in as well, picking up the broom. The handle broke against my leg and I heard the bone splinter. Then the pain hit me, so strong that I cried out before fainting away in front of the fireplace.

When I awoke, I was lying on the kitchen table, my fractured leg held straight by a makeshift splint. The two pieces of the broom handle were secured to my leg, stretching along either side of my knee, tufts of heather still tied to the end. Nothing is allowed to go to waste in my uncle's house. The pain that radiated from my fracture mingled with the burning caused by the lacerations on my back and in my mouth.

"I'm sorry, son," said a voice above me.

My father bent over my leg, without touching it. The house was silent.

"Your uncle has gone to fetch the blacksmith. I set the bone myself. It was a clean break – you'll walk again."

I blinked, exhausted by the pain. Bundles of herbs hung from the ceiling, their odour long gone. Shadows formed bruises along the smoke-blackened beams.

"You can't leave here," my father added in a weary voice. "It will be a month before your leg heals and you can bear the trip. That's too long. You have to be brave."

"What about the fairy?" I asked, overwhelmed as my memories returned.

"Don't say that word! She'll hear you."

He placed a large hand, smelling of dirt and the stable, over my mouth.

"That filth could hatch any time and get away from you. Do you know what will happen next?" His eyes bored into mine. "Do you?"

I nodded and groaned despite the gag. The pain gradually ebbed, proof that the fairy was there, in my stomach, weaving her cocoon. My stomach acids were working on her, transforming her. When she was ready, she would fly out of me, if I allowed her to, and the link woven between us would never be broken after that. She would respond to my call and dance before me, invisible to anyone else. Fairies change those who host them. Every child knows that.

During my sole visit to town, for the Fall fair the year I turned ten, my uncle had taken me to see a boy with unkempt hair, who was almost twice my age. Imprisoned in a cage, locked with a simple latch, he spoke to his fingers as he wriggled them in the light, like a puppet play filled with princes and birds. The stories he stammered were too fleeting to be understood. His eyes had been burned from staring at the sun without blinking.

My uncle gave the boy's mother two pieces of copper so I could get a close look at him. This unexpected generosity struck me as much as the spectacle of the cage and its occupant.

"You'll be brave when the blacksmith arrives," my father pressed me.

It was both an order and a plea. I groaned under his hand, not understanding. He bent down close to me and with the few words he had he explained what they were going to do to me. What they were *forced* to do to me. For my own good.

I believe I screamed. I passed out again when the blacksmith used his tongs. My father wouldn't let anyone hold me while they pulled out several of my teeth.

When I awoke again, lying in the bed that had belonged to my mother, two closed rings had been inserted at the corners of my mouth preventing me from opening it. A muzzle, forged in haste, forced its way through my teeth in holes drilled with a red-hot nail. Iron fangs held my jaws closed, while I groaned constantly with the suffering. My entire body hurt. Waves, first hot then icy, rolled up my leg, coiling in my belly and exploding through my lips like an aborted cry. With each breath, a thick, ashy-tasting foam filled my mouth with bitterness.

At the beginning, they tied my hands to the bedposts, so I couldn't hurt myself trying to tear the rings out. But after a week I was so weak I could barely move. Eventually, they untied me. To prevent me from starving to death, the blacksmith had pulled two of my top teeth. The hole was just large enough to allow a little goat's milk, broth and all the wine my father could get his hands on through. Before setting off for the fields each morning, he patiently fed me, deaf to my aunt's complaints that he would be late. Then I lay there alone until nightfall when he would come and talk to me about the herd and the scent of hay, as he washed me with a ball of straw dipped in water.

They left me something to chew on but I could no longer bite down. During the early hours of the day, when the pain left me alone, I imagined all kinds of curses, without being able to utter them. The rest of the time, I listened to the blood pound in the cavern of my mouth and waited for my bones to knit.

I was 12 years old and knew nothing of silence.

I lost weight. I was in pain. Time passed. In my mind's eye, I drew on the whitewashed walls, rubbing the rings that muzzled me with my fingertips. My fracture was slow to heal and my father spent every evening at my bedside. There was less wine and more milk in the drink he spooned through the hole in my teeth, sometimes even a meat broth or a beaten egg. Towards the end, I could feed myself – my hands had almost stopped shaking – but I couldn't make him understand that.

"Save your breath," he murmured, wiping the dirt off my chin.

The fairy was transforming in my belly and my dreams were tinted with bright colours. But I always woke up alone, without the slightest memory, and the muzzle prevented me from crying out in my sleep.

I started by posing my foot gently on the floor, in a careful effort to walk over to the chamber pot that my aunt always left at the other end of the room. Then, one day, I managed to walk with the crutch my father had made for me out of pieces of ash. The wood, carved green, creaked with every step. Traces of sap stuck to my skin, like some poorly healed wound oozing under my fingers. In the basin of water that sat on the windowsill, my reflection stared back at me like a rebellious horse. The laugh that this vision brought to my lips filled my eyes with tears.

The evening I was able to go down the stairs on my own to sit at the dinner table, my uncle set down the grey loaf of bread he was cutting and glanced heavily towards his wife.

"We'll leave tomorrow."

Nodding, I took the bowl of goat's milk my father held out to me. I poured the liquid carefully between my teeth. A rivulet dribbled down my chin and into a puddle on the table. The metal muzzle clicked against the bowl, like a clock. No one else was eating. I turned towards my aunt and she backed away, eyes wide with fear.

"It's already too late," she murmured, crossing her fingers in front of her. "There's evil in that child!"

My father railed against her and my uncle cursed me. As for me, I no longer listened to them. Inside my head,

the fairy had started to talk.

"I'll teach you stories," the voice said.

I lay stretched out on sacks of potatoes, at the back of the cart. It was drizzling and my lips were wet. I could neither answer the fairy nor complain. My uncle was afraid of the storm.

"Your muzzle will attract lightning," he grumbled, cracking the whip.

So I kept watch as the dark clouds approached. The town was a day's travel away. Since we wouldn't arrive until sunset, we'd either have to pay for a night at the inn or sleep in the mud, under the cart. Stories don't keep the rain off.

"I'll tell you secrets," the voice started in again.

I thought about the goats I'd left alone, about my dog who had run off because no one had bothered to feed him while I was healing. There are no secrets, only things no one has time to take care of.

"You'll do better than you'd think by looking at you," insisted the fairy.

I could see my face reflected in my uncle's eyes. I know how he saw me. When he'd harnessed the horse, he had looked at the leather straps and the rings in my mouth, shaking his head. Appearances may be deceiving, but the truth is often worse.

The fairy fidgeted in my stomach. During the night, she had threaded her way up to the impassable barrier of my teeth and I had heard her weep. Her sobs sounded like a waterfall in winter, when the last threads of water crack the ice. I would have liked to tell her that none of this was my choosing, but my words came up short against the muzzle. Finally, I groaned out the only song I knew, as best I could, until she stopped.

"*I don't want you to be different from us,*" my father had told me before locking my jaw. I only wish I had never wanted that either.

I finally managed to sleep, despite the voice and the rain, waking with the clop clop clop of horseshoes on pavement. The lightning had spared me and the muddy trail had changed into a decent road. We were approaching the wooden ramparts. The odour of smoke and rot hung in the air, with traces of other scents I couldn't identify – some sweet, others painfully spicy. Guards stopped us, then rummaged through the hay with their pitchforks. My uncle paid them, grumbling the whole time, and they let us through the gates. Above us, ferns burned in stone troughs along the rampart walk. The first stars were just coming out and the shopkeepers had already closed the shutters that protected their stands. Yet, people were still out in the streets. The town was a closed world, a world with different rules that my uncle barely understood and never discussed. Yet, when I saw how the townspeople looked me up and down, I knew that the differences did not run deep.

"I'll give you whatever you want," begged the fairy.

I sat down, my back against the hay, and stared back at the passers-by. My uncle could have had them pay to stare at my strangeness, but I quickly realized that he was too ashamed to even think of it. I didn't dare ask for

anything either. My dreams were too simple and I wasn't sure that what I wanted really existed.

"You'll guard the cart," my uncle said as he unhooked the horses. "I'll be back tomorrow at dawn. If someone comes up to the cart, show yourself. Your mug would scare any thief away!"

He took care of the horse, placing the blanket I had brought over its back. Then he walked off, leading the horse by its bridle into the shadows at the end of street. I couldn't make out where he was headed.

We had stopped in a small square surrounded by houses with closed shutters through which the scent of hot soup and cabbage escaped into the night. I burrowed into the hay, not daring to wander off from the cart. The night was damp and cool. The fairy was silent. I watched the moon hiding behind the clouds for a long time. Her pockmarked face was even uglier than mine, but she smiled, safe from the grasp of the world.

I wasn't really sleepy. The town sung with a thousand new sounds that prevented me from finding any peace. I rubbed my swollen gums gently, listening to the clink of the rings on my muzzle. The cluster of buildings crowded in around me, more houses, streets and walls than I had ever seen in my life. The line of the rooftops formed an alphabet against the sky punctuated by the moving lights of the guards who protected us from the outside. The outside world was vast beyond all reason. Enclosed in my cage of iron and hay, I thought about my uncle's farm and the pasture trails I knew by heart. The pain in my teeth would soon be gone. Even my leg was healing.

In the pit of my stomach, I suddenly felt the fairy stir and I understood just how alone I felt. I would have liked my father to come with us to town, but my uncle would never have allowed it. I listened, in case the voice in my head started to speak again. She was a prisoner too and we each had cause to hate the other.

I groaned and stretched, not rousing the fairy. In my stomach, the cocoon had opened and the fairy had taken refuge in it. I imagined her draped with the strips of her former refuge, in the depths of a dark cavern that must appear as incomprehensible to her as the world. My uncle had told me that she would tempt me in every way possible. I hadn't realized there would be so few.

"Are you sleeping?"

I had to spit out every syllable, stretching my jaws as far as I could. Hands on my stomach, I waited for an answer that took a long time coming.

"You don't want me," the voice said.

I shook my head, metal clanking. The night amplified the sounds, making them even sharper. I couldn't tell her just how much I understood her, or why both her destiny and mine were sealed in the same manner. All that came out of my mouth was a terrible gurgling.

Three times, I scraped my lips and tongue against the rings, trying to shape the words that haunted me. What I wanted was too simple for her. No kingdoms, no treasures, no extraordinary powers for me. Just something I wasn't even sure I could enjoy.

"Watch me when I sleep," I begged, unable to make myself understood.

Then I wiped the bloody slobber from my chin and waited.

"I had so much to give," said the fairy, "And I had to happen on you."

I thought she was going to start crying again, but her store of tears had been exhausted. She said good night to me in a weary voice and I counted stars until everything blurred before my eyes.

The roosters woke me at dawn. My uncle arrived shortly after that, leading the horse behind him. The sound of shutters being opened mingled with the shouts of the first merchants and the chirping of the birds. The air smelled of smoke. I was hungry.

"I lost two handfuls of coins to the guards," my uncle said, without looking at me. "Their dice are so loaded they can't even roll them. This whole situation has cost me a fortune. I hope you remember that!"

He harnessed the horse and gave him a sharp crack on the rump. The cart started forward with a grinding of axles. A window opened above us and I just barely escaped the contents of a chamber pot.

"Old Grimlich is waiting for us. You'll do exactly what he tells you to. He's seen more fairies blown that he has hairs on his head."

My uncle snorted briefly and drew a heel of bread from under his tunic. I was so hungry I couldn't keep my mouth from watering. The rings were rusting against my tongue and I licked them to ease the pain. The clack of hooves on cobblestone rattled my teeth.

I smelled the glassblower's shop before I saw it. The odour of molten glass and burning seaweed filled the street. The house was long and narrow, with a workshop at the back and a flat for apprentices in the loft. There was even a ring for tying up a horse, as in the rich houses my father had told me about to help me sleep.

My uncle took up the tongs and helped me out of the cart, roughly brushing the hay off my breeches. I leaned on my crutch and followed him inside. A young servant who was coming out of the shop turned away, appeared to change her mind, and gave me an encouraging smile. I smiled back as well as I could, scraping my lips on the rings. She remained on the doorstep, watching me, until I went behind the counter. In the very back, a door led to the glass shop.

The heat struck me like a club. In the middle of the room, stood a crucible filled with a molten paste, suspended over a furnace. A stunted old man, wearing a leather apron, was busy with the flames. Behind him, hooks and blades of all kinds lay on a workbench, along with flattened flasks that reflected the flames. A metal rod with a flared end stood in a bucket of ashy water. It was taller than I was and as thick as a snake. I had never seen anything like it.

In the pit of my stomach the fairy started to wriggle about.

Pushed by my uncle, I walked towards the fire. The ground crackled under my clogs and burning grit flared out from under the crucible. I had left the crutch against the door so it wouldn't catch fire.

"Your son?" the old man asked, without looking up. "He knows what to do?"

"My brother's son. Yes, he knows. He'll obey." Looking at me sideways, he added, "All in all, he's not a bad boy."

"The money?"

My uncle dug through his purse. Old Grimlich bit each coin before placing it in the pocket of his apron. Then he spat on his fingers and picked up the rod.

"If you want help selling it, I'll take a third of what you get," he said as he plunged the end of the tube into the crucible of molten glass. "That's a lot, but my clients are rich enough to satisfy both of us. Prepare the boy!"

Suddenly nauseous, I bent over. My uncle pressed his large hand against the nape of my neck, forcing me to straighten up.

"You'll be free soon enough," he said as he brought the tongs up towards my face. "I'm going to break the rings so you can open your jaw. But don't open your mouth until I tell you to. Then and only then you have to blow with all your might into the tube..."

"You must blow from deep, deep inside," said Grimlich. "Like when you shout."

"Are you ready?"

An ocean of acid filled me. The fairy was quiet, but I could feel her blindly hitting against the walls of my stomach. I couldn't stop myself from sobbing as I thought of the suffering I would be inflicting on her. My uncle sniffed in fury and caught my head under his arm. The tongs bit into the metal. With a crack, the first ring broke. Then the second. The fangs of the muzzle gave way next and my gums started to bleed.

"Keep your mouth closed, boy!" ordered the old man. "And look at me!"

The metal rod came up out of the crucible, a globe of molten glass wobbling at the end. The old man puffed up his cheeks and raised the end of the tube to his lips. By the light of the flames, I could see the veins in his forehead swell as he blew with everything he had.

Once the glass ball had swollen to the size of my two clenched fists, he turned it above the flames. My uncle released me, still waving the tongs about in front of my eyes. The pain in my mouth had never been so intense.

"Now!" shouted Grimlich.

He placed the end of the tube against my swollen lips. My stomach churned as I tasted his saliva. Like an echo, a cry rose up from deep within me. There were no words. Nothing but pure terror resonating within my bones. My uncle held me by the shoulders and the old man held the cane over the crucible. Just as I was about to start screaming myself, he struck me forcefully in the stomach.

A flood of bile filled my mouth and I blew with all my might to keep from choking.

The fairy blew out of me.

In the shop with its reddish shadows, she shone like the sun. Crumpled by my breath, she flew out curled up in a ball, into the molten glass. She tried to spread her wings despite the horrible heat, despite the pain. Iridescent reflections spun in a whirlpool in the heart of the

glass. Her cry was drowned in the molten mass. Finally, I no longer heard her.

"Easy, there," said Grimlich, as he took the rod from my hands. "I'll do the rest."

My uncle released me. I fell to my knees and vomited again. Heaving, I expelled the cocoon like the placenta of a stillborn baby. I didn't dare raise my eyes to look at what was left of the fairy.

"I'll get a good price for this," my uncle exulted. "All those colours!"

"She'll be cool enough to touch soon," said the glass-blower. "It's curious, but it's almost as if these filthy things absorb all the heat from within. Look at her, it's as if she's still moving."

I felt my temples pound. Groaning, I stood up, grabbed the tongs from my uncle's hand and struck the glass ball hanging from the end of the tube. It cracked with a dry tinkling, then burst open and shattered. My uncle roared, but I waved the tongs at him and he backed away, protecting his face.

The fairy spun like a leaf towards the ground. Fine needles of crystal pierced through her torso and her transparent wings crumbled to dust between my fingers as I tried to hold on to her. Sparks rained down from the fire, igniting her hair.

She burned like a rainbow.

Since that time, the wind whistles through the holes in my teeth and I smile less frequently. I never left the farm again. When I stretch out along the river, the sky is immense and empty above me. The clouds no longer write their white poems and I no longer know how to read the symbols in the water. I either digested my dreams from that time, or vomited them out.

My uncle died first. Then my father. My aunt had an attack that left her unable to speak. Sometimes I sit in front of her, beyond the reach of her cane, so that she can watch my face and try to respond with her eyes. She's the only family I have, after all.

I still snore with my mouth open. But now I sleep inside, safe behind locked windows. No fairy has ever come to watch me when I sleep.

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Translated by Sheryl Curtis

Jean-Claude Dunyach is one of France's leading science-fiction authors of recent years, and winner of various awards. His first story for us, "Unravelling the Thread" (issue 133), topped *Interzone's* readers' popularity poll for 1998. Later stories translated for this magazine were "Footprints in the Snow" (issue 150), "All the Roads to Heaven" (issue 156) and "Orchids in the Night" (issue 160).

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Real Man

Tony Ballantyne

Tall and with a stern expression, twice the height of a man, legs and arms like iron... Justin didn't want to think about it.

The aliens protected men, and only men, and Justin hated it. The way he had seen them tenderly take his friends' hands in a grip that could break steel if they so chose...

The way they...

His brother Malcolm was scornful about his fears. Justin remembered coming into the kitchen to find his brother chatting to Valerie about his recent trip to the Philippines. Malcolm and Valerie were over-friendly for a stepmother and stepson; she must have mentioned Justin's reservations. Malcolm had no hesitation in offering his opinion.

"You won't be any less of a man because something is looking after you. Maybe if you stopped contemplating your navel and got out a bit more..."

And then he looked right into Justin's soul and drew out his secret fear for the world to see. "Anyway, there's nothing for you to be worried about. Haven't you noticed that they don't have any genitals?"

Justin blushed furiously and walked out of the kitchen. It was easy for Malcolm to talk like that; his protector had only stuck around for six weeks. Six weeks, that was something of a record. Anyway, you only had to look at Malcolm's girlfriend to see he was normal. She wore her blonde hair cut short, lounging around the house in cycle shorts and crop top, her tanned arms and legs that looked so lovely when she sprawled against the white background of the sofa, no wonder even his father glanced sideways at her when she watched TV at night. And Justin had walked through the darkened house the night before to go to the bathroom and heard the slow, stealthy movement from his brother's room; the soft female moan, and he had sworn under his breath, such was his envy...

The doorbell rang and Justin shivered. It was here. He had no intention of going downstairs. He waited, staring blankly at the posters on his wall, trying to think of something else, anything at all. The doorbell rang again. Footsteps in the hall, the front door being opened and then his father called up the stairs.

"Justin. It's here."

Justin couldn't look at his father as he walked down the stairs. Valerie was standing outside in the cold dark night, speaking to something vast and black that squatted by the front door. Justin was blushing with furious embarrassment as he reached the foot of the stairs. Yellow light streamed from the hall into the frosty dark night. Two blue eyes turned and gazed at him.

"Good evening, Justin. Call me Patrick."

Patrick straightened up, and Justin found himself stepping out into the night to take a look at him. The alien was tall and hard and angular and masculine, a cross between Michelangelo's David and a suit of padded riot armour. Absolutely naked except for a tool belt around its waist, an iron sculpture formed from twisted girders that moved with a quick and easy grace, everything about the alien suggested a man stretched and hardened, from the flat-topped head with the long, serious face down to the wide feet planted firmly on the ground. The pale blue eyes gazed down at Justin with a calm authority.

"Go away. Leave me alone," said Justin, attempting to instil in his voice the anger he had felt a few moments before. The alien frowned and bent to push his face close to Justin's. Pale blue eyes, the pupils slit like a cat's, gazed into his soul. Its breath smelled of cinnamon and petrol, the light touch of its hands on Justin's shoulder made him think of a mechanical grab encased in soft leather.

"Do you mean to be rude? Do you realize you are being rude? Why are you asking me to leave? Don't you know

I am here to look after you?"

Justin felt his resolve weakening. He forced himself to speak. "I don't care. I can look after myself."

"Really? And yet you come out here on this cold night dressed in nothing but a Tee-shirt and a pair of tracksuit bottoms. Look at your feet, feel your hands. You stand in the light of the doorway, exposed to those who hide in the dark. Come. Let us go inside to your bedroom. We need to talk."

It picked up Justin as if he weighed no more than a doll and stooped to carry him across the threshold. It hunched its way through the hallway, jumped lightly up the stairs and then squeezed its way into Justin's room where it checked the curtains before sitting down on the floor. Its shoulders reached up the wall, nearly as high as a man standing. Its long dark legs stretched out across the floor to disappear beneath the bed. When it spoke its voice was gentle and understanding.

"I've been told that this will be an awkward moment for you, Justin. I never understood quite how awkward until I saw your reaction tonight. I have been told how to explain things to you..."

Justin sat on the bed and began to twist the quilt around in his fingers. Awkward? An alien in his bedroom that wanted to care for him. In his bedroom! His father and stepmother downstairs? What did they think? He looked at Patrick again. He was strangely attractive, in an elongated, angular sort of way. *It*, he corrected himself. It was attractive. Attractive in a freakish, fascinating sort of way, like body-builders draw the eye, the ordinary pumped up to some alternate vision of perfection. Patrick's shoulders were rubbing at an old poster of Miles Davis, pulling it free of the wall. It spoke.

"I want you to think of a woman, Justin. Think of Marilyn Monroe in *Some Like it Hot*. Have you seen that film? Don't think about her hair, or her figure, or her breasts or her legs, or how soft her skin looked, that isn't what this is about. Think about how protective she made you feel towards her. How you wanted to wrap your arms around her and to take care of her. Look after her and keep her safe and take her away from all of the men who wanted to use her or take advantage of her.

"Think about the girls in your class. Not the ones that you want to sleep with: think about the special one who makes you smile just to think of her. The one who, if you ever made it back to her room, you'd sit up with all night, just talking to her. The one it makes you sick, just thinking about someone else going off with her, abusing her. Do you understand what I mean? Does this make sense to you?"

"Justin, that's what I feel when I look at you. You're something so tender and special and precious. I am here to look after you. Do you understand that?"

Justin shook his head. "I don't need looking after. I can look after myself. Leave me alone."

"I can't do that, Justin. Listen, maybe if you were a little older you'd understand. Nobody can make it on their own; it takes a certain level of maturity to understand that. You're confused, you see me as a threat to your sexuality, and that's only because you don't know yourself. Relax."

It rose from the floor, hunched up beneath the ceiling, and reached towards Justin. Justin made to move out of the way, but the alien's black hands moved so quickly and easily to catch him in a gentle but firm grip. Fingernails the colour of aluminium dug into his arm. Patrick pulled Justin closer and closer, slit pupils in the pale blue eyes gazing deep into his soul. Cool breaths of cinnamon and petrol washed over him, the black lips parted to reveal a pale blue tongue. Closer still and Justin felt a wave of panic wash over him. The alien kissed him on the forehead, on the cheeks and finally on the eyes, before gently releasing him to sit back on the bed, his face tingling with alien saliva.

Patrick was breathing deeply. Justin sat still, too terrified to move. He watched as the alien settled back against the wall, its shoulders creasing the poster of Miles. It gazed at Justin with deep, knowing eyes.

"Don't be afraid, Justin. Relax. I'm here to protect you." Justin nodded.

"You look exhausted. Have you been sleeping properly?"

Of course not, thought Justin. Not with the worry of you arriving gripping me over the past few nights. Nonetheless, he murmured something vaguely affirmative. Patrick looked at him again.

"No, you haven't been sleeping. You are tired. Bedtime. You need to sleep."

"Fine," said Justin. "I'll see you in the morning. Where will we meet?"

Patrick looked hurt. "Where will we meet? I thought I made that clear. I need to protect you, Justin. I'll be sleeping here, on the floor."

Justin's stomach felt as if he had just swallowed a pint of ice water. Nonetheless, he nodded slowly.

"Okay. Make yourself comfortable. I'm just going to brush my teeth."

He pushed his way out of the room and walked down the corridor to the bathroom. Valerie sat in his father's bedroom, cross-legged on the bed, eating a packet of crisps and reading a magazine. She glanced up at Justin and gave him an "is everything all right?" look. He looked away in embarrassment and walked into the bathroom and breathed the pine disinfectant and soap smell. Everything looked so normal under the antiseptic white strip lights. The three toothbrushes lined up by the half-squeezed tube of toothpaste. His father's shaving foam, Valerie's collection of creams and exfoliants. He had looked at them every night for the past ten years. Now there was an alien stretched out on the floor of his bedroom, waiting for his return.

The thought of the pale blue eyes gazing so earnestly into his made him feel hot and embarrassed and sick all at the same time. Cold night air slipped through the bathroom window, left ever so slightly ajar. Beyond the window lay the flat, asphalt roof of the extension. He stood, thinking...

Justin hung from the edge of the extension for a few moments, summoning courage, and then let go. He landed on the cold concrete of the drive and quickly staggered out onto the road, keeping close to walls and

hedges that hid him from view of the house. His leggings and tee shirt felt pathetically flimsy against the cold of the night, his left arm stung from where he had scraped it on the brickwork. He moved swiftly down the road, heading towards his grandfather's house. Granddad had firm opinions about men looking after themselves. He would understand.

He turned the corner and, now that he was safely out of sight, he began to jog. Ahead of him, a vague movement as a cat slid into a hedge. It was three miles to Granddad's house; it was a shame he hadn't thought to bring the bus fare.

Suddenly he was rolling on the ground, wondering how he had got there. His head was ringing with pain and his back felt wet. Something black and huge flew over him and landed on the ground. It rolled and stood up. Patrick. No, not Patrick. The face was fatter and wider, the alien not so tall. If Justin had seen it before tonight he would have thought it just like all the others, tall, long and incredibly masculine. Now, even the few minutes he had spent in Patrick's company let him see that this creature was definitely inferior to his protector. The creature raised one arm, it held something bright, shiny and sharp in its hand. Justin felt a thrill of detached horror. It was going to kill him. The arm came back and then the creature threw the object at Justin with incredible force. The object spun towards him, too fast to dodge. It stopped just in front of his face, held by a steady black hand, fingernails the colour of aluminium.

Patrick moved easily in front of Justin. It spoke with a noise like someone kick-starting a motorbike. The other creature turned and began to run. Patrick hurled the sharp object back towards it, catching it between the shoulders. The creature staggered and then continued its flight. Patrick looked down at Justin, his face full of quiet fury.

"Tomorrow, when I know you are safe, I swear that I will hunt that creature down and kill it."

Justin nodded. He felt light-headed, completely removed from reality. The anger drained from Patrick's face and was replaced by something even more terrible. Disappointment. Calm, and deadly serious, like a favourite schoolteacher who had caught him out doing something wrong.

"Justin," it said. "Why did you run from me? Didn't I tell you I would protect you? Didn't you trust me? Didn't you want me?"

Patrick looked hurt. Justin still felt incredibly light-headed. He spoke from a long way away. "I never used to need protecting until you turned up."

Patrick was silent. Justin looked on without interest. Yes, it definitely looked upset, he thought, and then: did one of those creatures just try to kill me? He began to shiver.

Concern suddenly ran across Patrick's face. "Look at you. You're freezing. Come on, we won't go back to your house, not tonight. I'll take you somewhere else."

It placed one huge arm around Justin and picked him easily from the ground.

"It was going to kill me," said Justin.

"I know," said Patrick. "It's all right now."

Justin woke up feeling perfectly content. Lovely and safe and warm. He opened his itching eyes and looked around. Bare branches above him, yellow leaves around him. Where was he? A great black arm was wrapped around him, holding him gently. Even though a frost had licked at the edges of the grass nearby, the warmth emitted by Patrick had kept Justin comfortable all night. He pushed the arm gently away and sat up. He was in a tiny copse of trees looking out over a great flat expanse of ground. In the distance he could make out a huge earth mound. A nest, he realized. Justin was near an alien nest.

"How do you feel?" asked Patrick.

Justin wriggled his shoulders. They felt perfectly fine and yet he was sure that he had been badly cut there last night. He frowned. The memory of the attack surged up inside him, then suddenly it seemed strangely blunted and distant. He was with Patrick. Nothing could harm him now. He shook his head and gazed accusingly at the alien.

"What are you doing to me? You're messing with my mind, aren't you?"

Patrick looked hurt. "You had a shock," it said, "I'm trying to make you feel better."

Justin backed away, feet tangling and tripping on the old dead brambles that twisted around him. "Leave me alone. I don't want your help. I didn't need any help until you arrived."

He turned and began to run from the copse, away from Patrick and the silent shape of the alien mound, the air blowing in cold mist from his lungs. As he ran he felt the fear of the night before begin to engulf him. He slowed to a gentle walk. Every step became more difficult, the fears of the world wrapped around him. Eventually he stopped and turned to face Patrick, standing half-hidden in the copse.

It was no good, he could go no further. He knew he needed someone to look after him, and he knew that Patrick knew.

After a moment, the alien began to walk towards him.

They walked home in silence through morning streets, the first trickles of the impending rush hour building around them. Three miles to Justin's house, and he felt as if the eyes of the world were upon him.

His father had left for work when he arrived home. Valerie sat in the lounge drinking coffee as she put on her face, the television blaring in the background.

She scowled at Justin. "So you're back. It's a good job Patrick let us know where you were. We could have sat up all night worrying for all you cared."

"Sorry," mumbled Justin.

"Well," said Valerie. She pressed her lips hard together and then checked her lipstick in the mirror she had set on the coffee table. She nodded, satisfied, and stood up. "I've got to go to work. Are you going to college today?"

"I hadn't thought about it."

"You should do. You've got to go sooner or later, might as well get it over with." Her expression suddenly softened. "Hey, it will get better. Malcolm hated it too at first, but he got used to it soon enough."

She flashed him a smile, and walked from the room.

Justin stood for a moment and then came to a decision. He ran upstairs, quickly washed and changed, and then collected his laptop for the day's lessons.

Patrick was waiting for him outside. It stood by the extension, its head easily high enough to see the roof and Justin's escape route from the night before. It turned as it heard Justin's footsteps.

"I've rigged a little thing up here in case anyone tries to use this route to attack you."

"Oh, good," said Justin sarcastically. He tried not to notice the way Patrick tried to hide its hurt at the comment.

They strode down the road and around the corner to the bus stop. Another young man stood there, his alien standing just behind him. Patrick glanced at it for a moment before adopting an alert posture, scanning the street. An overweight young woman of about Justin's age was reading the timetable. She glanced at Justin, and then Patrick, and then looked away.

The bus arrived, the front end sinking to the ground so the passengers could alight. As Justin pulled back to allow the young woman on board, Patrick swiftly slid past and began to scan the bus for danger. It turned and nodded to Justin to board, who pointedly waited for the young woman to go before him. She gazed at Patrick and then cast a scornful glance at Justin before boarding. The other young man and his alien boarded. The bus pulled away.

"Sit away from the window," said Patrick, hunched in the seat in front of Justin.

Justin sullenly obeyed. Aliens on a bus – it was odd how everyday the scene was, he reflected. The aliens had arrived on earth seven years ago; slipping into everyday life so smoothly it was as if they had always been there. They had quickly integrated themselves into human society by virtue of their ordinariness. There had been no great meetings between leaders, no spaceships descending from the stars. One month, seven years ago, the aliens' earth mounds had begun to grow. Nothing special, just earth mounds spaced in a hexagonal pattern, usually ten miles apart, closer where the population was denser, further away elsewhere. All over the world, piles of earth getting larger and larger day by day. One month after they had begun growing, the aliens had stepped out and had chosen the first men to protect.

Sitting on the bus, driving past the rain-washed slope of the local mound on his way to college, it was hard for Justin to believe that life had ever been any different. He was just old enough to remember how young men of his age used to go out in groups to pubs, or to football matches, or to get drunk and fight. He was just young enough to have missed out on understanding why. For Justin, late teens and early 20s meant spending your time on your own. A boy and his alien. He noticed the young woman who had boarded the bus with him gazing scornfully in his direction. She glanced away.

The security guard in the college entrance looked from Justin to Patrick and then away. Men with aliens didn't cause trouble. Down the long corridor, past the catering students in their white coats spilling out of the kitchens for a quick smoke outside... Three or four stood in a sullen group

in the corridor, their aliens standing nearby. Of course, they wouldn't be allowed to harm their health with nicotine. The aliens were there to protect them. It was funny, thought Justin; now he had one of his own, it seemed as if the tall, black bodies of the aliens were everywhere.

The morning passed in a blur, Justin unable to concentrate on his lectures. ICT and English and Media Studies passing unnoticed. Lunchtime came and he sat in the canteen with some of the other protected – pale-faced young men swapping embarrassed glances and rumours.

"Did you hear about that man over at Downey Fields? His protector got killed by a bus. Thirty seconds later he was decapitated by an alien throwing-knife."

"They've got the government under the thumb. They talk about mutual understanding, that's just to keep the panic down. They really rule this world."

"That's not true. They don't have a pack mentality. They don't understand leading and following. They all act as individuals."

Two women from Justin's Media Studies class passed by carrying lunch trays. They looked at Justin's little huddle and walked on. The girls kept well away from the protected, the aliens made it quite clear they weren't welcome. Women didn't find the aliens attractive. Justin had been surprised by that, they looked so tall and masculine; he had assumed they would find them as appealing as he did threatening. But, hey, there you go. The bitter conversation went on.

"...of course she was scornful. Girls won't look at you when you've got an alien. They think you're a wimp."

"No they don't, they feel threatened. How can they compete?"

The aliens never guarded women. Only men. No one would say why. It wouldn't be right to say their actions were shrouded in mystery, more that their business was an open secret that no one had seen fit to share with Justin yet. Like adults kept sex a secret from children...

Justin ignored the chatter. Or tried to. Afterwards they walked back to class across the wide stretch of muddy grass that separated the North wing from the South.

"Why won't you speak to me?" said Patrick plaintively.

Justin said nothing. The second attack came so abruptly he was still concentrating on his silence as he hit the ground, his laptop flying from his hands to crack open on the concrete nearby. His head seemed to explode with pain, bright lights flashed in front of his eyes. He tried to stand up but he staggered and fell over, tried again without any success. He fell to his knees and began to retch with pain. There was the snarling, mechanical noise of two aliens cursing each other. Justin was suddenly knocked again, kicked in the side and sent sprawling on the ground.

"Bastard," he grunted. The noise suddenly ended, the fight was over. He could see the black shape of an alien retreating.

"You got him, Patrick. You got the bastard..." Justin came to a halt mid-sentence. Patrick lay on the ground in the middle of a slowly gathering crowd. One of its arms was obviously broken; it lay at an impossible angle. Its eyes were wide open and gazing at nothing.

A woman knelt down beside it and touched its iron skin.

"I think he's dead," she whispered.

"What?" Justin pushed his way through to Patrick and knelt down in the cold grass beside it. He waved his hand over Patrick's eyes and gently touched it on the chest. The skin felt cold and smooth, like touching an imitation leather sofa. Was that right? Justin didn't know. It was the first time he had ever touched Patrick.

The crowd was thinning. Somebody gave a moan.

"It's coming back."

Of course it was coming back, thought Justin. Here he was now, unprotected, crouching in grass and mud in the middle of an expanding circle of people. Pale faces were staring down at him from the windows of the grey blocks of the college.

"Patrick," he said, softly, and shook the alien's chest gently. There was no response. He rose to his feet and gazed across the grass. The second alien was approaching, limping badly, but with its gaze fixed upon Justin.

"Stop it. Get them to stop it!"

A young woman with a shaved head was shouting at a huddle of young men who stood nearby, looking on in horror, their aliens standing at ease behind them, looking on without interest.

"You bastards! Make them make stop it!"

She jumped forward to seize one of the men, but his protector stepped easily forward and pushed her away. She fell to the ground, but continued shouting.

So this is it, thought Justin. So this is it. The alien was ten metres away. Eight metres, its left leg was badly broken, Justin could see the skin over the shin deform and stretch as it took its weight. Its left eye was torn, pale blue blood spilled down its face. It fumbled in the belt it wore around its waist and pulled out a dull grey knife, the end cruelly hooked. A gutting knife.

"Run. It's wounded, it won't catch you."

The shout came from the crowd. Justin forced himself to take a step backward, but he couldn't run. The alien's murderous gaze held him fixed.

"Run!"

He stepped back again. The alien raised its knife. There was a terrifying explosion of movement and a shower of pale blue fluid fell across Justin. Patrick stood over the mangled remains of the dead alien, its body ripped open down the front, dark blue organs spilling onto the ground. Patrick turned to face Justin, and Justin saw the pride and intelligence and cruelty that filled its eyes.

"I swore to you that I would kill that creature. This I have done. I swore an oath to protect you. This I will do."

Justin felt nothing but anger. "I thought you were dead! What the hell did you think you were doing?"

"I had to tempt it closer Justin. I could not chase it; I must stay close to you to keep you safe. It knew this."

Justin wiped his face. He was covered in alien blood. The crowd was gazing at him in horror. One of the group of protected men was being sick.

"Why are you doing this? I never asked for you to protect me?"

"Call it love," said Patrick. It swayed and then collapsed.

No one would come near them, and who could blame them? Justin had to call his father and ask him to bring the car around to the front of the college. Between them they managed to pick up Patrick's body, slippery with blood, and carry it to the car. One of the security guards grudgingly helped them by opening doors and clearing a path through the crowds. They somehow managed to roll Patrick into the back of the estate and then drove it home.

It looked uncomfortable, squeezed into Justin's bed. Valerie washed its skin with warm water. Apart from the broken arm, it had a few scratches down one side. There was nothing else.

"So why's it unconscious?" asked Justin.

"What am I, a doctor?" snapped Valerie. "Or a vet?" She caught Justin's expression and her mood softened.

"I'm sorry. I don't know. Maybe something got hurt inside? We need someone who understands aliens. Don't they have doctors?"

"I don't think so," said Justin. "They're not like us. They all stand alone"

"Really?" said Valerie. "This one was willing to risk its life for you. Why was that, I wonder?"

"I don't know. I wish it hadn't."

"You don't mean that."

"I know."

They phoned Malcolm. He was in Rio de Janeiro.

"... just admiring the scenery," he said.

"And what's this scenery's name?" laughed Valerie, but her smile was hollow.

They quickly got down to business.

"He should be safe as long as he stays indoors. The other aliens won't know that he is unprotected then. They mainly operate by what they can see. Besides, they won't know whether or not it's another trick."

"How long will this last?" called Justin. "How long do I have to skulk around the house?"

Malcolm sounded unconcerned. "I don't know. Anything from six weeks to six months. I don't think anyone has ever been protected for longer than a year."

"Why do they do it?" asked Valerie.

"Valerie, I have got no idea. I'll tell you one thing, though. When I was in China a few months ago I remember walking through the streets on my own. I was the only westerner there, and everyone was staring at me. It's not surprising; I was the biggest person there, both in height and build..." his voice tailed away. There was silence.

"Yes?" said Valerie.

"I don't know. I felt so strange and alien there, I wanted to explain why I looked so different, tell them that I was normal, explain my actions."

"And?"

"I don't know. Maybe the alien feels the same way."

Of course it does, thought Justin, it was always trying to tell me how it felt about me.

Do I love it? thought Justin, gazing down at the unconscious form of his alien, curled up tightly in his bed. The thought was an experiment, like standing on the top of a tall building and wondering if you wanted to jump off.

Imagining the fall. No, came the answer. I don't love him. It. I don't love it, but it says it loves me. And I don't feel the same way in return. Is that fair? What if it was a man? What if it was another man who had just told me that he fancied me? Would I be flattered or disgusted? Or pleased? Or ashamed? What if I fancied a girl and she didn't fancy me back? Like Gillian Kaye. I resented her for that. I felt she owed me something.

I feel something for Patrick. It's not like when it first turned up here. I've seen it lie here all these days and nights, and sometimes it moans and sometimes it calls out and I remember that it honestly believes it is protecting me. I remember that one night we slept together by the nest and I woke up feeling so safe. Is that what all the other men feel? No wonder they are too embarrassed to mention it. Real men don't need protecting.

Justin shifted uncomfortably on the floor. His back was beginning to ache from leaning on the cold wall. Miles Davis looked down upon him.

Patrick had lain in a coma for three weeks now, and Justin was worried. Its skin was beginning to turn chalky, its breathing had become hoarse and laboured. Just how long could they go without eating or drinking?

If only there was someone to ask, and yet who? The aliens did not seem to care for each other at all. To spend your whole life and to only care for one person, and for that person to belong to another species. Now that was alien.

The memory of waking up next to Patrick came back to Justin. Now why did that thought keep occurring to him?

The answer suddenly dawned. The nest. If there was anywhere to find out about Patrick, that would be the place.

He shivered, despite himself. The nest must be the most dangerous place in the world for him to go now. He didn't dare leave the house for fear of aliens, and he was thinking about entering their home. No way. Why should he do that for Patrick?

Because you feel something for *him*, came the answer.

It took nearly a week to pluck up the courage, but Patrick's unconscious body seemed to weigh ever more heavy on his conscience. As he stood in the bathroom gazing at his reflection, a bottle of Valerie's apricot exfoliant in his hand, he had to admit that his decision wasn't entirely without self-interest. With Patrick out of action, he was a prisoner in his own house.

It was two o'clock in the morning. Valerie and his father were sleeping in their room. He hoped that the two bottles of wine they had shared over dinner wouldn't have filled their bladders yet. Ten more minutes and he would be out of the house, undetected.

The basin was clogged with his hair, two razors lay in the plastic waste bin by the sink, clogged with curling red strands. He had drenched his head in his father's after-shave so that pink, stinging rivulets of blood ran from the nicks in his bald skull. He had rubbed and patted Valerie's talcum powder under his arms and in his groin, he had cleansed and toned himself all over and then drenched himself so thoroughly in Ambre Solaire, Eau de Toilette and Febreze that his skin was raised in fiercely itchy red bumps.

He had thought of nothing else all week. What was it about him that marked him out as one of the protected? He could leave the house in disguise, dressed in Valerie's clothes, but suppose that wasn't enough? Maybe they could smell something on him. Whatever it was, he wasn't taking the chance. That first night he had run out barely dressed. This time he would be bundled up warm.

He finished rubbing exfoliant onto his face and sat on the edge of the bath to pull on a pair of Valerie's tights. They caught on the stubble on his legs, soaked up the blood where he had cut himself shaving. One of Valerie's bras, stuffed with toilet paper, and then a long spotted dress. The waist was too tight, the arms restricting. He felt ridiculous, but still... The aliens ignored women. Maybe it would work. Valerie's shoes didn't fit. He had to settle for the old shoes his father used to garden in.

Silently, he glided downstairs. Valerie's make-up bag rested on the coffee table in the lounge, ready for the morning. He quickly and messily applied some lipstick and then face powder, realizing as he did so he had got it the wrong way round. He thought about rubbing it off and trying again, but he was only delaying the inevitable. His heart pounding, he realized he was ready. It was time to go.

Carefully, silently, he took the chain off the front door, took Valerie's knitted beret from the coat rack and slipped out into the freezing night.

It was exhilarating to be outside for the first time in weeks. The stars were bright and harsh, his ears and his bare legs burned in the cold. He took several deep, misty breaths as he strode down the street, the unfamiliar feel of Valerie's clothes making his steps awkward.

He was being watched, he knew it. Somewhere behind him a large black shape was curling itself, preparing to pounce. The night felt so still, his movement seemed magnified against the silver grey calm.

He turned onto the main road and began to walk past the lit fronts of the sleeping shops. A flicker of movement made him jump with fear. A spinning orange light placed outside a taxi office. He tried to relax, but his heart was pounding too hard.

He walked on up the street, past the shops and then on into another run of houses, their empty, blank windows gazing down at him. He was making good progress. Only another 20 minutes or so to the closest nest.

The alien had been gazing at him for some time before he noticed it. Standing by the wheelie bin placed on the street for the morning collection. Absolutely motionless, its pale blue eyes followed Justin as he walked closer and closer. Justin felt something cold take hold of his heart, he almost turned and ran. He knew it was the worst thing that he could do. He forced himself to keep on walking, up to the silent watcher. The pale blue gaze swept up and down his body, gazing at his chest, at his shoes, at his head. Other than that, no movement. On past the creature, and down the street, his heart pounding, waiting for the rush of feet, that sudden disjointed feeling as he picked himself up from the ground without remembering how he had got there. Nothing. The creature didn't know. He walked on into the night, a sudden hope rising in his heart.

The nest lay in the middle of the flat ground, a black mound that blocked out the glow from the streetlights that lay beyond. A stillness seemed to gather around it, the sounds of the city were distant and muffled. Justin felt as if he was approaching an empty black space that had been cut from the surrounding streets, a space that swallowed all light and movement. The soft grass beneath his feet thinned and gave way to bare earth ploughed into a corduroy pattern that crunched beneath his feet. Humans rarely approached the nests. He remembered watching a team of scientists entering the Hampstead Heath Nest when the aliens had first arrived, but since then, nothing. The aliens had worked the trick of becoming commonplace and without interest. They play with our brains, Justin suddenly realized. He remembered that morning just after Patrick had arrived, how it had soothed and calmed Justin. He had known then that Patrick was doing something to his mind. How had he forgotten that?

Stumbling and tripping in the strange clothes towards the dark shape of the nest, he realized something else: it wasn't he who had thought of dressing in this manner, it wasn't Justin who had thought about changing his scent. How could he have known? His mind jumped to Patrick, lying there on the bed unconscious, but even so, still exerting an influence. There was a whisper of sound, earth shifting on the side of the mound. Justin took a deep breath and walked on. It wasn't as if he had a choice.

A smooth tunnel had opened up, the entrance a couple of metres above the ground. Justin climbed up the gentle slope of the mound and entered. The tunnel sloped downwards. A faint light could be seen in the distance, deep in the mound's heart, and Justin walked towards it. The light cast everything around him into shadow, too dark to see. Justin felt movement around him and he thought he could make out the small figures of children filling the tunnel. Something brushed against his legs and the movement ceased, the figures seeming to vanish into the wall. He felt a sudden emptiness, as if something had just been taken from him. He paused for a moment, trying to make sense of the feeling, but the sensation passed. Justin walked on towards the light.

He emerged in a wide, low-ceilinged space, a bubble of air trapped in the soil of the mound. Something mechanical stood in the middle of the space, something that looked like a cross between a telescope and a satellite dish. It was made of parts constructed on earth: empty cardboard boxes bearing familiar logos such as Sony and JVC lay round about, neatly flattened and stacked. Justin walked around the apparatus, examining it. It didn't appear finished as yet; ribbon cables trailed from it, unconnected the ends. Components lay in neat piles next to racks, waiting to be slotted into place. A soldering iron lay unplugged on an old copy of the *Sun* newspaper.

A small grey figure walked into view.

It looked like an alien. Not an alien like Patrick, but the old media idea of an alien. Half Justin's height, grey and hairless, a large head set with two large black eyes, a slit of a mouth and two tiny nostrils. Its hands, too large for the spindly arms, were spread wide in welcome. It smiled

at Justin. He swallowed, and then forced a smile in reply.

The alien stood, patiently waiting for something to happen.

Justin coughed nervously. "Er, hello?" he said.

Something tall and dark stepped out of the shadows behind the grey alien. Another alien, but this time resembling Patrick. Tall and powerful, but with a slight difference. This one looked smoother in some way. Fresher faced. Younger. It fixed its pale blue eyes on Justin and spoke.

"Hello."

Justin felt his heartbeat accelerating. He took a step backwards. The Grey noticed his fear and gestured to the taller alien.

"Your wife tells you not to be afraid. You are no longer in any danger from us."

"Oh." Justin's mouth felt dry, and then... "My wife?"

The two aliens seemed to be communicating by gesture and something else. The taller moved its hand slightly and gazed at the smaller grey alien. After a moment's pause the taller one spoke again.

"I'm sorry, maybe I did not translate so well. The female has asked me to explain. The seed you have been carrying within you has been passed on to her. As the carrier who successfully fertilized a female I mistakenly believed that the human term to describe the pair of you was husband and wife."

"The seed that I have been carrying within me?"

The alien appeared to frown. "Yes. Patrick's seed."

Justin was stunned. He took a deep breath. "Patrick's seed? What, you mean like sperm?"

There was another pause, and then the alien began to speak.

"But of course, you do not know. Patrick would have implanted his seed upon you shortly after you first met. It usually enters humans through the moisture in the eyes or mouth and then lives within the body, maturing. After a time it is passed on to a fertile female."

"He put a seed in me? Why?"

"I believe the mechanism is known as natural selection. Only those males who have the strength and intelligence to protect the animal that carries their seed get to reproduce."

Justin felt a wave of disgust, anger, revulsion and understanding. So that was what love meant to Patrick. Nothing but sex. Should he feel surprised? He felt a little stunned. He didn't know what to feel. He tried to work up some anger. He should have felt used; instead, he felt a little giggle bubbling inside. He was standing in a pit deep beneath the ground, dressed in his stepmother's clothes, reeking of perfume and using a tall protector as a translator to argue with a grey alien who was almost his wife. The absurdity of the situation hit him like a custard pie, splat, in the face. Justin gave a tired laugh.

"He told me that he loved me, but he was only after one thing." He laughed again, and then spoke without heat. "What gives you the right to use us like this?" he asked.

The tall alien gave a surprisingly human shrug. "It's not a question of right or wrong. That's just the way it is. Nature judges a life form successful if it can reproduce. The Greys are one of the most profligate races in the

galaxy. If nature were to judge, would not the Greys' actions be deemed right by its standards?"

Justin gazed at the small grey alien, wondering at what had just been said. His gaze travelled from his small silent "wife" to the tall spokething.

"You look so human. Why is that?"

There was a pause. The tall alien gestured at the smaller, which gave a dismissive wave of its hand. The two aliens gestured to each other further. They appeared to be arguing. After some time the Grey appeared to give way and shrug. It turned and gave Justin a weary smile. The taller alien spoke.

"The Grey says I may as well tell you, you know too much anyway. The Greys are all female. They made that decision millennia ago when they decided upon their method of reproduction. When they find a suitable planet, they set about inducing changes from light years away, imposing their pattern on life that already exists there. We seed-carriers are always formed in the image of the males of the dominant species."

It paused, smiling. After a moment's reflection it spoke.

"There were those who argued against this method of reproduction, but it has been proven successful time and time again. It is not enough to be strong; those who wish to reproduce must use their strength to the benefit of others."

It gave another smile. "When I am old enough I will leave the nest and seek a male to implant my seed within. Hopefully I will prove equal to the task of protecting him. Just as Patrick cared for you."

Its expression suddenly became stern, and Justin was reminded of how Patrick used to look at him when he had done something foolish.

"Don't look at me as if I am unreasonable. Our races are more alike than you might think. The Greys have flourished on this world. Soon, they will move on again."

The alien turned to face the structure that looked so like a telescope which stood in the centre of the hall. Justin shivered as he turned to look. He hadn't followed that much of the speech. His mind was fixed on a sentence from right back at the beginning. He licked his lips nervously.

"Sorry, what did you mean when you said I knew too much?"

The alien paused and then gestured to the Grey. The Grey smiled and gestured back. The tall alien laughed.

"Oh, don't worry about it," it said. "You've already figured out that we can manipulate your mind. You'll just wake up and find this has all been a dream. However, we could do something for you. You got in here in an extremely short time, as did your brother. Patrick chose well. In many humans, the seed dies within six months without fertilizing a Grey. There is a strength in your genes that we would do well to study. Your world would benefit from that strength that lies within you. The Greys are always willing to help others. After all, it's in their genes."

Justin gave a bitter laugh. "I bet it is. All of this just for sex."

"Not at all. Sex may have motivated Patrick to implant his seed in you, but it does not account for the warmth that he felt towards you, or you to him. Remember that

night you slept together near the mound."

Justin blushed. "He made me feel those emotions."

The Grey appeared to object to Justin's words. It began to gesture violently. There was a pause as the tall alien read what it had to say. The movement went on for some time. Eventually, it ended and the tall alien turned back to face Justin.

"No. She says only partly. Even then, what you felt was a reflection of what Patrick felt for you. Nature makes us reproduce; it is something else that makes us love. That's what makes you a real man. Maybe you'll see. We're certainly going to give you the chance. I wonder if you will live up to your own morality?"

Darwin was hot, not that Justin cared. He sat in the shade, drinking a cold beer, watching the girls walk past in the street. A coach had just pulled in from Alice Springs, a group of 19- and 20-year-olds were sorting through the pile of bags and rucksacks that lay by the road, seeking out their luggage. Justin gazed at the women's brown legs and arms, at the hair tied up with brightly coloured bandannas above their long necks. One of them in particular caught his eye. She reminded him of a girl he used to know at college, back in Britain. She had the same haughty look that he remembered when he asked her counterpart out for a drink. He toyed with the idea of asking her over to his table, offering to buy her a cold beer.

He had no doubt that she would agree. Justin had hit a real purple patch lately. It had started the morning after he had woken up in his bed, the morning after Patrick had vanished. All his hair had been shaved off, he reeked of perfume, and he had nothing more than hazy memories of what had happened the previous night. He must have got so drunk and yet he didn't remember how.

Still, that was the morning he had seen the light – walked straight into college and quit his course, withdrawn from the bank the money his mother had left him in her will, and then set off around the world. See strange places, spread a little of his pollen. Why not? He had good genes. Someone had told him that once, he couldn't remember who... Anyway, with his luck lately, he could hardly go wrong. He just had to look at a girl and she was his. What the hell. He crooked an eyebrow at the girl who reminded him of the one from college. She stood, knee-deep in rucksacks, one hand pushing back her fringe as she gazed around. She saw Justin and smiled. Justin smiled back.

Confused memories came through. Was he doing this right? He calmed himself. Play it cool, he thought. Act like a real man.

Tony Ballantyne last appeared here with the ingenious comedy "Indecisive Weapons" (issue 172) – which was preceded by such stories as "Single-Minded" (issue 162), "A New Beginning" (issue 163) and his two "Restoring the Balance" pieces (issues 167 and 168). He lives in Oldham, Lancashire.

The Best Introduction to the Mountains

Gene Wolfe

There is one very real sense in which the Dark Ages were the brightest of times, and it is this: that they were times of defined and definite duties and freedoms. The king might rule badly, but everyone agreed as to what good rule was. Not only every earl and baron but every carl and churl knew what an ideal king would say and do. The peasant might behave badly; but the peasant did not expect praise for it, even his own praise. These assertions can be quibbled over endlessly, of course; there are always exceptional persons and exceptional circumstances. Nevertheless they represent a broad truth about Christianized barbarian society as a whole, and arguments that focus on exceptions provide a picture that is fundamentally false, even when the instances on which they are based are real and honestly presented. At a time when few others knew this, and very few others understood its implications, J.R.R. Tolkien both knew and understood, and was able to express that understanding in art, and in time in great art.

That, I believe, was what drew me to him so strongly when I first encountered *The Lord of the Rings*. As a child I had been taught a code of conduct: I was to be courteous and considerate, and most courteous and most considerate of those less strong than I – of girls and women, and of old people especially. Less educated men might

hold inferior positions, but that did not mean that they themselves were inferior; they might be (and often would be) wiser, braver, and more honest than I was. They were entitled to respect, and were to be thanked when they befriended me, even in minor matters. Legitimate authority was to be obeyed without shirking and without question. Mere strength (the corrupt coercion Washington calls *power* and Chicago *clout*) was to be defied. It might be better to be a slave than to die, but it was better to die than to be a slave who acquiesced in his own slavery. Above all, I was to be honest with everyone. Debts were to be paid, and my word was to be as good as I could make it.

With that preparation I entered the Mills of Mordor, where courtesy is weakness, honesty is foolishness, and cruelty is entertainment.

I was living in a club for men, a place much like a YMCA. I was thoroughly wretched in half a dozen ways (much more so than I had ever been in college or the Army), but for the first time in my life I had enough money to subscribe to magazines and even buy books in hardcover. *Planet Stories*, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Weird Tales*, and *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* – pulps I had read as a boy while hiding behind the candy counter in the Richmond Pharmacy – were gone; but *Astounding Stories* lingered as a digest-size magazine a bit less costly

than most paperback books. There was also *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, put out by the same company that had published *Curtains for the Copper* and other Mercury Mysteries that my mother and I had devoured. I subscribed to both, and to any other magazines dealing with science fiction or fantasy that I could locate.

Here I must do someone (quite likely the late Anthony Boucher) a grave injustice. I no longer recall who wrote the review I read in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. It was a glowing review, and I would quote at length from it if I could. It convinced me then and there that I must read *The Lord of the Rings*. In those days (the middle 1950s, if you can conceive of a period so remote) the magazine offered books for sale – one might write enclosing a cheque, and receive the book one had ordered by mail. Accustomed as you are to ordering from Amazon.com, you will deride so primitive a system; but you have never been a friendless young man in a strange city far from home. Now that you have enjoyed yourself, please keep in mind that the big-box stores we are accustomed to did not exist. There was no cavernous Barnes & Noble stocking a thousand titles under Science Fiction and Fantasy, no two-tiered Borders rejoicing in a friendly coffee shop and a dozen helpful clerks. There were (if the city was large and one was lucky) one or two old-line book shops downtown;

they carried bestsellers, classics like *Anna Karenina*, cookbooks, and books of local interest, with a smattering of other things, mostly humour and books about dogs. The city in which I was living also boasted a glorious used-book store, five floors and a cellar, in which one might find the most amazing things; but these things did not include science fiction or much fantasy – the few who were fortunate enough to own those books kept them. There may have been speciality shops already in New York; there very probably were. But if there were, they could not have specialized in fantasy or science fiction. Or in horror, for that matter. It was a surprise, a distinct departure from the usual publishing practices, whenever any such book appeared.

An example may make the reason clear. In 1939, August Derleth and Donald Wandrei had published twelve hundred copies of H. P. Lovecraft's *The Outsider and Others*, at their own expense. Fanzines had publicized their effort widely and with enthusiasm; but selling those twelve hundred books, which cost three dollars and fifty cents before publication and five dollars after, took four years.

The copy of *The Fellowship of the Ring* that I received from *Fantasy & Science Fiction* lies on my desk as I write. It is, I suppose, the first American edition; it was issued in 1956 (the year in which I bought it) by the Houghton Mifflin Company of Boston. It is gold-stamped, and is bound in cloth the colour of slightly faded denim. Its elegant dust jacket vanished long ago, though I still recall it. Its back board holds a much-folded map of Middle-earth, sixteen inches on a side, showing among other places the Shire, the Lost Realm of Arnor, Mirkwood, the Brown Lands, Rohan, and Gondor. On its half-title there is now a quotation from Thoreau that I inscribed in blue ink many years ago. I give it because its presence on that slightly yellowed page should convey to you more of what this book meant to me in those days than anything that I might write in my little essay possibly could.

*Our fabled shores none ever reach,
No mariner has found our beach,
Scarcely our mirage is seen,
And Neighbouring waves of floating
green,
Yet still the oldest charts contain
Some dotted outline of our main.*

You are not likely to believe me when I say that I still remember vividly, almost 50 years later, how strictly I disciplined myself with that book, forcing myself to read no more than a single chapter each evening. The catch, my out, the stratagem by

which I escaped the bonds of my own law, was that I could read that chapter as many times as I wished; and that I could also return to the chapter I had read the night before, if I chose. There were evenings on which I reread the entire book up the point – The Council of Elrond, let us say – at which I had forced myself to stop.

Naturally I had sent for *The Two Towers* as soon as I could. Eventually it came, bound and typeset as beautifully as *The Fellowship of the Ring*, with the same map (I confess that I had hoped for something new) in its back. Just as I inscribed that quotation from Thoreau in *Fellowship*, I put one from Conrad Aiken on the half-title page of *Two Towers*:

*There was an island in the sea
That out of immortal chaos reared
Towers of topaz, trees of pearl
For maidens adored and warriors feared.*

*Long ago it sunk in the sea;
And now, a thousand fathoms deep,
Sea worms above it whirl their lamps,
Crabs on the pale mosaic creep.*

By the time I received *Two Towers*, I had learned my lesson – I ordered *The Return of the King* at once. That, too, is on my desk. With one other thing, its back holds a delightfully detailed map of Rohan, Gondor, and Mordor. The quotation I inscribed on its half-title is from Robert E. Howard. You have my leave to quarrel with me, but I think it the finest of the three, indeed one of the finest things have ever read.

*Into the west, unknown of man,
Ships have sailed since the world began.
Read, if you dare, what Skelos wrote,
With dead hands fumbling his silken
coat;
And follow the ships through the wind-
blown wrack –
Follow the ships that come not back.*

If you remember the end of this last volume, how Frodo rides to the Grey Havens in the long Firth of Lune and boards the white ship, never to be seen again in Middle-earth, you will understand why I chose that particular quotation and why I treasure it (and the book which holds it) even today. But there is one thing more.

You see, ten years later I wrote J.R.R. Tolkien a fan letter. He answered it, and I tipped his answer into the back with the map. The body of his letter is typewritten (I would judge on an electric typewriter) but the footnote is in script. I would like to express my appreciation to Douglas A. Anderson, who is familiar with Tolkien's hand and has very kindly corrected my misreadings of it.

7th November 1966

Dear Mr Wolfe,

Thank you very much for your letter. The etymology of words and names in my story has two sides: (1) their etymology within the story; and (2) the sources from which I, as an author, derive them. I expect you mean the latter. **Orc** I derived from Anglo-Saxon, a word meaning demon, usually supposed to be derived from the Latin *Orcus* – Hell. But I doubt this, though the matter is too involved to set out here. **Warg** is simple. It is an old word for wolf, which also had the sense of an outlaw or hunted criminal. This is its usual sense in surviving texts.* I adopted the word, which had a good sound for the meaning, as a name for this particular brand of demonic wolf in the story.

Yours sincerely,
J.R.R. Tolkien

*O.E. **wearg**

O. High German **warg** –

O. Norse **varg-r** (also = "wolf", espec. of legendary kind)

Surely I need not tell you that I read and reread these books. I married in November of that wonder-filled 1956; and Rosemary and I read them to each other, most often while driving. A note in *The Return of the King* indicates that my older son Roy and I read them together, reading the final page on April 20, 1967. (Roy was born in 1958.) Eventually I feared that I would read my Houghton Mifflin hardcovers to pieces and bought paperbacks, putting the hardcovers away in the old, glass-fronted bookcase where they will stand again when I have completed this tribute to their author.

Yet in a sense, it is complete now. I have shown you, I hope, what these books have meant to me. If you find echoes of them in my own books and stories (and particularly in *The Wizard Knight*, with which I have struggled for the past year) you will not have discomfited me – I am proud of them. Terry Brooks has often been disparaged for imitating Tolkien, particularly by those reviewers who find his books inferior to Tolkien's own. I can say only that I wish there were more imitators – we need them – and that all imitations of so great an original must necessarily be inferior.

What, then, did Tolkien do? And how did he come to do it?

The second question can be more easily answered than the first. He was a philologist (Greek philo-logos, a lover of words), and he had somehow escaped the modern cast of mind that makes us glory in ignorance and regard our forebears, who somehow muddled along without washing machines and air conditioning, with

contempt. I have quoted a great deal already. I hope that you will permit me this one, too:

*... The stupid, strong
Unteachable monsters are certain to be
victorious at last,
And every man of decent blood is on the
losing side.
Take as your model...
... Him who as the death spear entered
into his vitals
Made critical comments on its workman-
ship and aim.
Are these the Pagans you spoke of?
Know your betters and crouch, dogs;
You that have Vichy-water in your veins
and worship the event,
Your goddess History (whom your fathers
called the strumpet Fortune).*

The author is Tolkien's close friend, C.S. "Jack" Lewis.

It is said with some truth that there is no progress without loss; and it is always said, by those who wish to destroy good things, that progress requires it. No great insight or experience of the world is necessary to see that such people really care nothing for progress. They wish to destroy for their profit, and they, being clever, try to persuade us that *progress* and *change* are synonymous.

They are not; and it is not just my own belief but a well-established scientific fact that most change is for the worse: any change increases entropy (unavailable energy). Therefore, any change that produces no net positive good is invariably harmful. Progress, then, does not consist of destroying good things in the mere hope that the things that will replace them will be better (they will not be) but in retaining good things while adding more.

Here is a practical illustration. This paper is good and the forest is good as well. If the manufacture of this paper results in the destruction of the forest, the result will be a net loss. That is mere change; we have changed the forest into paper, a change that may benefit some clever men who own a paper mill but hurts the mass of Earth's people. If, on the other hand, we manufacture the paper without destroying the forest (harvesting mature trees and planting new ones) we all benefit. We engineers will tell you that there has been an increase in entropy just the same; but it is an increase that would take place anyway, and so does us no added harm. It is also a much smaller increase than would result from the destruction of the forest.

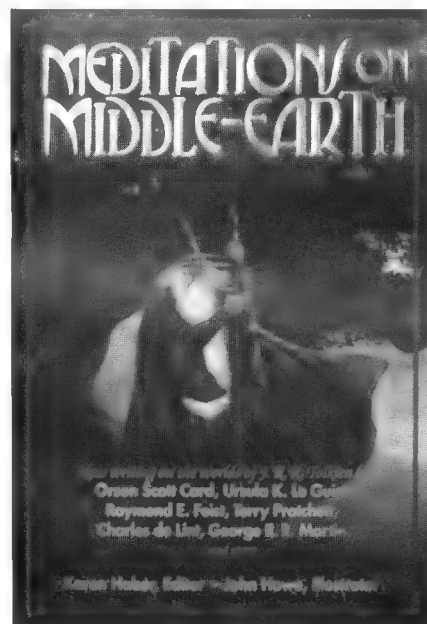
I have approached this scientifically because Tolkien's own approach was historical, and it is a mark of truth that the same truth can be approached by many roads. Philology

led him to the study of the largely illiterate societies of Northern Europe between the fall of Rome and the beginning of the true Middle Ages (roughly AD 400 to 1000). There he found a quality – let us call it Folk Law – that has almost disappeared from his world and ours.

It is the neighbour-love and settled customary goodness of the Shire. Frodo is "rich" in comparison to Sam, though no dragon would call Frodo rich; Sam is poor in comparison to Frodo, though Sam is far richer than Gollum, who has been devoured by the tyranny and corruption of the One Ring. Frodo does not despise Sam for his poverty, he employs him; and Sam does not detest Frodo for his wealth, but is grateful for the job. Most central of all, the difference in their positions does not prevent their friendship. And in the end, poor Sam rises in the estimation of the Shire because of his association with Frodo, and rich Frodo sacrifices himself for the good of all the Sams.

A different illustration is found among the elves of Lorien, in their love of beauty and their love of nature. They are Sylvan Elves (East Elves) but the rulers they choose to obey are Eldar (West Elves). They choose to be ruled by people better than themselves, in other words, exactly as we choose to be ruled by people worse. Most clearly of all it is shown in their will to preserve the wisdom of the First Age.

Earlier I asked what Tolkien did and how he came to do it; we have



A new collection of essays on Tolkien by well-known writers – but it does not feature the present essay by Gene Wolfe, which sees print for the first time in this magazine. See "Books Received" for more details (page 64).

reached the point at which the first question can be answered. He uncovered a forgotten wisdom among the barbarian tribes who had proved (against all expectation) strong enough to overpower the glorious civilizations of Greece and Rome; and he had not only uncovered but understood it. He understood that their strength – the irresistible strength that had smashed the legions – had been the product of that wisdom, which has now been ebbing away bit by bit for a thousand years.

Having learned that, he created in Middle-earth a means of displaying it in the clearest and most favourable possible light. Its reintroduction would be small – just three books among the overwhelming flood of books published every year – but as large as he could make it; and he was very conscious (no man has been more conscious of it than he) that an entire forest might spring from a handful of seed. What he did, then, was to plant in my consciousness and yours the truth that society need not be as we see it around us.

Sam Rayburn, a politician of vast experience, once said that all legislation is special-interest legislation. Of our nation, and of the 20th century, that is unquestionably true; but it need not be. We have – but do not need – a pestilent swarm of exceedingly clever persons who call themselves public servants when everything about them and us proclaims that they are in fact our masters. They make laws (and regulations and judicial decisions that have the force of laws) faster and more assiduously than any factory in the world makes chains; and they lay them on us.

It need not be so. We might have a society in which the laws were few and just, simple, permanent, and familiar to everyone – a society in which everyone stood shoulder-to-shoulder because everyone lived by the same changeless rules, and everyone knew what those rules were. When we had it, we would also have a society in which the lack of wealth was not reason for resentment but a spur to ambition, and in which wealth was not a cause for self-indulgence but a call to service.

We had it once, and some time in this third millennium we shall have it again; and if we forget to thank John Ronald Reuel Tolkien for it when we get it, we will already have begun the slow and not always unpleasant return to Mordor. Freedom, love of neighbour, and personal responsibility are steep slopes; he could not climb them for us – we must do that ourselves. But he has shown us the road and the reward.

CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA:

Notes from the Home Front

Gary Westfahl

Well, what other topic could an American possibly write about, a month or so after September 11, 2001?

Although there has been little else on my mind nowadays, I discuss the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon with great reluctance: it is dangerous to analyze a story before it is finished, and during the weeks between this column's completion and publication, dramatic new developments could make some comments sound laughable, irrelevant, or repugnant. And as an expert of sorts only in the field of science fiction, I freely acknowledge that I am completely unqualified to pontificate on this topic.

I also don't want to criticize others in the science fiction community who have commented on this tragedy, especially those who were close to ground zero; one deals with overwhelming disaster as best one can, and if references to familiar literature help people make it through troubling times, so be it. Still, I was disheartened by repeated observations that the scenes of destruction in New York City were "like science fiction," or "something out of science fiction." Such remarks might be attributed to the common misuse of the term "science fiction" to mean "something strange," or "something that isn't true," or they could stem from occasional images of devastated national landmarks in science fiction films like *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* or *Independence Day*. From my perspective, however, the events of September 11 bear little relationship to the central themes and texts of science fiction as I have known it for many years. If there is a literary connection to be made, it involves a related but distinct genre, once known as future-war stories before reemerging under the name of technothrillers.

Almost everyone would agree that the future war story originated with George Tomkyns Chesney's *The*

Battle of Dorking (1871), and almost everyone who has actually perused that document would agree that it was an inauspicious beginning. As novels about coming global conflicts proliferated in the decades that followed, they did display certain features that are unquestionably associated with science fiction: they took place in the future, and they usually posited either modest or spectacular new technological innovations to be employed in warfare. However, despite the energetic research of I.F. Clarke and others, these stories were and remain almost entirely forgotten, and not only because they were soon overtaken by events. Rather, to a significant degree, future-war stories were antithetical to the emerging genre of science fiction.

As eventually articulated by John W. Campbell, Jr., science fiction is a literature open to the possibility that scientific and social progress will bring far-reaching and fundamental changes to the human condition, in contrast to the emphasis on "Eternal Truths" in "main stream literature." Yet future-war stories rarely posit any genuine changes: once-weak nations may rise to the status of great powers, and vast arrays of flying machines may unleash unprecedented weapons of mass destruction, but novels otherwise maintain the worldview of Metternich, as the elite groups governing various countries keep forging and breaking alliances to gain an advantage or plot new series of advances to quickly defeat an enemy. There are some honourable exceptions, such as H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, but one could generally define the future-war story as "a story of a past or present conflict somewhat distorted and projected into a flimsily futuristic context" and encounter little dissent.

Campbell also explained that science fiction was a literature that sought to explore the effects of new technological and social developments on everyday

life, offering not stories of isolated inventors creating new devices that are used once and immediately suppressed, but stories of new devices that are fully integrated into human society. Yet the typical innovations of future-war stories were only superscientific *deus ex machinas* that may have turned the tide in a global struggle but otherwise had no effects on ordinary people, and stories characteristically focused only on prime ministers and generals, not citizens and foot soldiers. Future-war stories were therefore less narratives and more narrativized logistics games (which uncoincidentally emerged during the time when future-war stories enjoyed their greatest popularity) with little to say about the coming interactions of society and advanced technology.

The actual horrors of World War I, never predicted in these quaint, sanitized sagas, temporarily dissipated all interest in future-war stories, but after a decade of peace, the field re-emerged in the 1930s, with a number of stories appearing in science fiction pulp magazines, like John Taine's *Twelve Eighty-Seven* (1935), and slick magazines, like Fred Allhoff's *Lightning in the Night* (1940). Positing that these stories represent a concealed yearning for renewed warfare after long periods of peace, one might have expected another burst of future-war stories in the 1960s, but the explosion of the atomic bomb irrevocably limited the author's possibilities, as it was now clear that a future conflict along the lines of World War II would immediately destroy most of the planet, a prospect not conducive to lengthy, suspenseful war novels. There could be stories about barely avoiding World War III, like *Fail-Safe*, or stories about the horrific aftermath of World War III, but World War III itself could not be the subject of a sustained narrative.

As the world evolved strategies to avoid such an all-out war, the literature of future war correspondingly

evolved into stories of far-ranging international conflicts that stopped short of all-out war – alternately describing espionage, secret negotiations, covert operations, and scattered skirmishes, all presented as moves in a vast chess game played by powerful enemies reluctant to commit to open warfare. Like future-war stories of the past, these novels typically take place in the near future and feature modest scientific breakthroughs; also like future-war stories, their worldview is conservative, positing an indefinite continuation of current political tensions and moving toward outcomes that bring no meaningful changes to the situation, or to human civilization as a whole. In a concession to the democratic spirit of the times, technothrillers strive to incorporate the perspectives of both grunts and generals as the action leapfrogs across the globe, but their similarities to the future-war stories of a century ago are otherwise remarkable.

So, I currently feel like I am living in a technothriller, not a science fiction novel. There are periodic outbursts of drama – planes crash into the World Trade Center! Anthrax outbreak in Florida! – amidst a long series of quieter developments all over the world – late-night conferences in the White House and in the hills of Afghanistan; leads investigated in Germany and in California; soldiers moving into place in Uzbekistan and in the Indian Ocean. One can almost envision the terse, geographic chapter headings: RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA; ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN; CAMP DAVID, MARYLAND. Even the rhetoric emanating from the White House appears designed to prepare Americans to vicariously participate in a technothriller, as we are advised that the conflict will be long and variegated, with initiatives undertaken all over the world, some of them public and some of them secret. Tom Clancy has already appeared as an expert talking head on television, and if officials of the United States Defense Department are finding it helpful to talk to Hollywood writers about possible terrorist threats, they might as well seek out the advice of writers like Clancy and Dale Brown on how to put the pieces together and cope with a multifaceted world struggle.

The trouble with living in a technothriller is that I have never really cared for the genre: I have never been attracted to stories with military trappings or interested in following the parries and thrusts of determined adversaries on the contemporary global stage. More to the point, as a longtime reader of science fiction, I prefer stories that depict major innovations, paradigm shifts, in the human condi-

tion; yet the technothriller, like its literary ancestors, is mentally trapped in the past, committed to the indefinite continuation of the status quo. The fact that our newspaper headlines now recall the technothriller is not, as some would have it, a sign that our world has undergone some massive transformation, but rather a sign that our world, for the most part, remains depressingly the same.

That isn't, I know, what the smart people should be saying. Like another commentator that I'm not criticizing, I should be describing the World Trade Center disaster as unmistakable evidence that the world has been turned upside down, that everything in our lives has changed, that none of the old truths hold true any more – which means (one must assume) that we are now forced to rely upon the guidance of those few gifted visionaries who first recognized and announced the death of the old order. But the argument doesn't bear examination. Arab and Muslim resentment of the Western world? As Osama bin Laden has so thoughtfully explained, that dates back at least 80 years. Organizations dedicated to acts of violent terrorism? These have been active for decades, killing perceived enemies or innocent bystanders with alarming regularity, especially in a few benighted regions of the world. Fears that certain nations – Iraq, China, Syria, even renegade elements in the former Soviet Union – may be covertly assisting terrorist networks? This is only evidence that the Cold War is not really over, that dangerous adversaries remain on the scene, and that even former enemies turned friends cannot yet be fully trusted. Granted, the bombings of September 11 were larger in scope than previous terrorist acts, but not that much larger; several attacks have killed hundreds of people, while this one killed thousands of people – a tenfold increase to be sure, but we are still far from talking about megadeaths.

As evidence that there was nothing significantly new or different about what happened at the World Trade Center, consider the various polemical “explanations” of the event that surfaced almost immediately. Many people instantly displayed an absolute certainty that the attack could be attributed to such things as: the evils of American foreign policy in the Middle East; the dangerous tendency toward fanaticism inherent in the Muslim faith; the just punishment of God for the sinfulness of modern Americans in tolerating homosexuality and other offences against morality; the natural, inevitable violence and irrationality of the male species. Some of these views were more risible than others, but they all had one thing in common: they had been rehearsed.

Rather than the surprise, confusion, and incoherence one finds in reactions to truly unprecedented events, these horrific attacks, by and large, served only to trigger tape recorders in people's brains, prefabricated responses nurtured and polished to perfection by many previous occurrences.

(And my own thoughts about these events are not necessarily any better. Having ruminated in the past about the world's failure to change in the manners once foreseen in science fiction, I am naturally inclined to view this disaster as additional evidence to support my views – an observation that interestingly serves to both undermine and buttress my position that this event illustrates a continuation of, not a break from, old patterns.)

It is arrogant to assume that reading science fiction makes one an expert on any given situation – because it doesn't. Despite extravagant claims, science fiction does not deal with all aspects of life, all possible situations, and science fiction has done nothing to prepare me for the world we now find ourselves in. And please don't tell me, like yet another unnamed and uncriticized commentator, that the problem lies in the genre's incurable optimism. Yes, science fiction did prepare me for a benign world government embarking upon the peaceful colonization of the cosmos, but it also prepared me to live under ruthless, oppressive totalitarian regimes, and it prepared me to painfully stagger through the ruins of a world reduced to ashes by nuclear war. Science fiction prepared me for many different future worlds transformed by scientific and social progress. What science fiction did not prepare me for, and what science fiction cannot account for, is a world that stubbornly remains the same.

So, even as I write, the technothriller continues, with familiar conflicts and intrigues in various locations throughout the world, which will no doubt eventually lead to a tenuous resolution closely resembling the status quo. And I am reminded that, for all of the triumphs and toys that modern science has brought into our lives, the human race largely remains trapped in patterns of behaviour from the past, still divided by nationalities, religions and cultures. Americans wave their flags, Iraqis burn them; Israelis and Palestinians take turns assassinating political leaders; Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland cannot bring themselves to trust each other; Indians and Pakistanis skirmish over Kashmir. I long to stop reading the newspapers and return to reading science fiction, where the events, whether transcendent or tragic, are at least occasionally novel.

Gary Westfahl

Science Fiction Has Happened

Tim Robins

Science fiction may not have been the literature of the 20th century, but, as of the 11th of September 2001, it may well be the literature of the 21st. As people learned of the hijacking of American passenger planes and their use as weapons against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, sf became a common referent for making sense of the events.

Newsday.com reported the story of eyewitness Jake Birner, who – emerging from the Canal Street station, to find a gaping hole in that once-unmistakable New York landmark, the World Trade Center – said that he saw “a plane slam into the other tower. There was a big, giant fireball. It was like science fiction.” On BBC2’s *Newsnight* a UN representative, talking on the edge of the New York disaster area, stated, “science fiction has happened.”

When comparisons to sf were elaborated, the reference point tended to be blockbuster movies. Jenny Johnson, in *The Mirror* (12 Sep 01: 22-23), described television coverage of the attack as a “gripping TV nasty,” but her comparisons were to the products of Hollywood: “We had seen all this before. We had grown up with these images of cities sliced apart, infernos blazing and civilizations devastated. They visited our cinemas and our TV screens everyday... *Armageddon*, *The Tearing Inferno*, *Independence Day*.” References to sf by the media were matched by more personal comparisons – a contributor to a newsgroup of sf fans described the September events as seeming like “a prequel to *The Planet of the Apes*.”

It is not surprising that comparisons were made between the September events and Hollywood sf. Susan Sontag, in her 1965 essay “The Imagination of Disaster,” identifies “toppling skyscrapers” as being among the many

representations of the extraordinary that characterize sf films. She argues that at the core of films such as *When Worlds Collide*, *Rhoda* and *Battle in Outer Space* lies a concern with “the aesthetics of destruction” and the “peculiar beauties to be found in wreaking havoc, making a mess.” Ian Watson’s recent *Interzone* (April 2001) story “Hijack Holiday,” in which hijackers fly a passenger plane into the Eiffel Tower, demonstrates that an appreciation of the aesthetics of destruction can also lie at the core of literary sf.

Snapshots of Disaster

Like magazines, television can relocate the aesthetics of destruction to the heart of the home. Watching the news on television, I found myself responding to the September events as a spectacle. I felt frustrated at not being able to see the first plane hit the tower. I waited patiently for more footage of the second impact, concealed by most recordings but eventually revealed thanks to found footage. Bizarrely, the collision looked like a cartoon. The plane entered the tower completely and left a plane-shaped hole in its wall.

But television was not the only or the main medium through which I experienced the September events. I first learnt of them by mobile phone, I then watched events unfold on television and, later, listened to reports broadcast on my car radio. The next day, I bought as many papers as I could. However, by then, accounts had proliferated across so many media that it seemed unlikely that I could achieve a satisfactory understanding of the totality of their mediations.

In the event, all I have been left with are fragments of memory, moments where the September events intersect

with my life. Here are three of them:

It is the afternoon of September 11th and I am going to see Paul Brazier, walking up the hill from the North Laines in Brighton. I am talking to another friend on my mobile phone. I am trying to decide whether I should accept part-time teaching at a Brighton college of further education. I outline a variety of options, including selling my flat and moving back to Cardiff. My friend interrupts me and says that planes are attacking the World Trade Center. I hang up. At Paul’s house, we spend the afternoon watching the plane hitting the tower. We channel-hop between terrestrial and satellite stations in search of more news, more pictures and, after a while, some critical analysis.

I am with friends in a newly opened cinema in Cardiff, watching a Sunday preview screening of *AI: Artificial Intelligence*. The story is set in a post-catastrophe future and follows the adventures of a humanoid robot who, abandoned by his surrogate human family and inspired by *Pinocchio*, goes in search of the Blue Fairy to turn him into a real little boy. The robot’s travels take him to a partly submerged New York. As the camera sweeps across the broken remains of sunken skyscrapers, we see the World Trade Center’s twin towers, still standing. The audience reacts in different ways: gasps, murmurs, and chuckles. Despite the emotional management of pre-publicity, I feel a sense of loss.

It is Friday October 12th, 11am. I am in a hospital corridor. I am waiting to see a consultant. I have been told that my father has cancer. I am waiting to learn whether or not it is treatable. At one end of the hospital corridor a radio is tuned to the Nicky Campbell show. Campbell and guests are discussing the media coverage of the September 11th events. One lis-

tener has e-mailed the show to complain that his wife has been so traumatized by the news that she has given up work and refuses to leave the house. The listener blames television for frightening her and says the media should behave responsibly. The guests are sympathetic, but conclude it is the responsibility of the news to keep people informed.

These recollections (the gathering together again of people, places, events and things) resemble flashbulb memories. This type of memory was described by cognitive psychologists Brown and Kulick, who investigated popular claims that, "Hardly a man is now alive' who cannot recall the circumstances in which he first heard that John Kennedy had been shot in Dallas."

Brown and Kulick argued that highly consequential events for individuals become fixed in memory by a neurological "Now Print" mechanism developed in the course of human evolution. Memory prints may include the place where the information was first heard and the informant. They noted that increasingly consequential events happened at a distance from individuals and "the informant was usually radio or television."

Subsequent research called the accuracy and mechanism of flashbulb memories into question. Brown and Kulick had recognized that individuals rehearsed such memories covertly (in their minds) and overtly (in conversations with friends), but Neisser, in his edited collection *Memory Observed* (W. H. Freeman & Co.), argued that this rehearsal was a constructive process and flashbulb memories were shaped after the event. He also noted that flashbulb memories conformed to cultural conventions of storytelling and argued that the reason they were consequential was that they "recall an occasion when two narratives that we ordinarily keep separate – the course of history and the course of our own life – were momentarily put into alignment."

The interaction of highly consequential historical events and an individual's life course can produce fateful moments for the individual. In his book *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Polity), sociologist Anthony Giddens has defined fateful moments as moments when an individual stands at a crossroads in their life. Fateful moments are characterized by events that disrupt individuals' routines including the way they expect life to be. Fateful moments are "highly consequential for a person's destiny" and include occasions "where a person learns of information with fateful consequences." At such moments, individuals have to make decisions that may change their future. It is this decisive-

ness that differentiates fatefulness from fatalism, which is the tendency just to let things take their course.

In my recollections above, one fateful moment is the news about my father's cancer, the decisions we must make based on the consultant's expert opinion and the changes this may make to my father's and my own plans for the future. A second fateful moment includes being offered part-time work, my decision to accept or reject it and the uncertainty I feel about how my decision will or will not change my life. In both these examples, the events of September form only a dramatic accompaniment. They are not yet fateful to me.

The moment the September events became fateful for me was the moment I saw the twin towers in the film *AI*. In the film, the shot of the towers establishes that we are in New York in the future, and symbolizes how humanity has endured global catastrophe; whereas, after the events of September 11, the presence of the twin towers in the film is also a reminder of their absence in reality. The sense of loss I felt at the sight of them was a sense of the loss of a future. My belief in a secure, planned-for future in which I could make decisions was undermined. But my fatalism was countered by my decision to write about the events of September 11th for *Interzone*. This article represents a fateful moment for me.

Risky stories

Science-fiction films such as *AI* and *Independence Day* contribute to conditions in which fateful moments can occur. This is because they imagine the future as a place of risk. Fateful moments are symptomatic of risk societies – societies in which the future is

perceived as needing to be brought under human control. By attempting to make the it knowable, sf is one such attempt to control the future and regulate risk.

The tensions between the known and the unknown, the controllable and the uncontrollable, produce the future as a place of risk. *Planet of the Apes*, a well-known imagining of disaster, provides a useful example of this. In the film, Taylor, an astronaut from Earth, believes he has arrived on an alien world populated by highly intelligent apes. But when he escapes from the apes' city he is confronted with the sight of the ruins of the Statue of Liberty. This shocking encounter is a fateful moment for Taylor, as he realizes that his plans to escape the planet and return to human civilization are no longer possible. Taylor's hypotheses about the world are refuted; a new life course must be planned.

For Taylor, the Statue of Liberty in ruins is also a shocking portent of the possibility of further knowledge and further unknown and unpredictable fateful moments to come (in *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* they arrive). But, where audiences unaware of the film's twist ending might share in Taylor's shock, I now find the sight of the Statue of Liberty in ruins routine. This is because I have seen the film many times and because the image has been repeated, with variations, in places such as the covers of *Astounding Science-Fiction* and the first issue of DC Comics' *Kamandi: The Last Boy on Earth* and in the film *AI*. In this context, the Statue of Liberty in ruins has become just a conventional sign for a future, post-catastrophe Earth. In contrast, for me, the sight of the twin towers of the World Trade Center intact appropriated the former potency of the Statue of Liberty

Snapshots of disaster: "poor taste" humour can routinize disasters. This composite picture was downloaded from the internet soon after September 11th. Like a flashbulb memory, this "happy snap" links an individual life to a highly consequential event.



because, in reality, they now lie ruined.

As a genre, sf is an example of an institutionalized risk environment. Genres are institutions because they routinely organize activities and emotions, and act as contracts between media industries and audiences – they promise a set of pleasurable risks. They are formed by audiences' classification of texts on the basis of the pleasures they are trusted to provide. Events such as those of September 11th can disrupt this trust. In going to see *AI*, I trusted the film's makers and myself to be able to manage risk, to strike a balance between pleasure and danger. The destruction of the World Trade Center's towers broke this trust.

Institutional risk environments manage and to an extent limit risks while enabling participants to engage in displays of daring. Sontag notes the kinds of risk sf films can provide: "In films, it is by means of images and sounds... that one can participate in the fantasy of living through one's own death and more, the death of cities, the destruction of humanity itself."

What the audience also dares in participating in such fantasies is the experience of overwhelming anxiety, fear or even depression. Erving Goffman, in *Frame Analysis* (Northeastern University Press) has called this experience "flooding out." This is often engineered into entertainment environments, and adds to their riskiness.

Goffman takes an example from fairgrounds: "If 'vertigo' rides... are to be effective in creating pleasurable fear for some... then a few are likely to be seriously frightened, that is, find the experience 'too much for them'." The same is the case for the emotional rollercoaster rides of blockbuster cinema. Going to the cinema to watch *AI*, I courted the experience of "flooding out."

Of course, witnesses to the events of

September 11th could have had pathological experiences. Lorna Duckworth, social affairs correspondent for *The Independent* (13 Sep 01: 6) pointed to one such experience when she wrote: "Experts said survivors of the disaster, bereaved relatives and even those who simply watched the carnage on television could require help in coming to terms with their distressing experiences." She goes on to cite the views of Dr Michael Isaac, a consultant psychiatrist at London's Maudsley Hospital –

"Anyone who has watched the pictures on TV can hardly fail to be affected by it... Once people go beyond shock they often develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). People re-experience the trauma through repeated nightmares or daytime flashbacks... they will also become extremely over-vigilant. If they hear a loud bang or aircraft flying overhead they will jump out of their skin... some may never get over it."

Post-traumatic stress disorder is exemplary of the individual's experience of risk in a risk society. To function in the present, individuals must exist within a protective cocoon of trust, a phenomenal world called, by Goffman, "the Umwelt." This travels with the individual in time and space and acts as the interface between the individual and situations of danger or alarm. But the Umwelt also manages time and space. It is comprised of the "here and now," a state in which a livable present is achieved by regulating the past and future. This includes processes such as remembering and forgetting the past and planning for the future. Facing up to the future involves controlling future-orientated emotions associated with risk, such as foreboding, anticipation, excitement and expectation. For the individual, PTSD, flooding out and fateful

moments disrupt the Umwelt's management of time and space.

Experts such as Dr. Isaac and my father's consultant are often called upon to preside over fateful moments and contribute to their definition as fateful. Expert knowledge produces risk scenarios based on evaluations of probably risk. So do newspaper stories which draw on such knowledge. Like sf's stories of the future, Duckworth's alarming account of a nation in the grip of PTSD must be seen as another risk scenario.

Fateful television

The news proliferates risk scenarios. After the events of September 11th, the news media's references to sf contributed to the construction of the world as a place of risk. As a metaphor ("science fiction has happened"), the boundaries between fiction and fact collapsed, science-fictionalizing reality. In a science-fictionalized world, sf could provide a sense of an ending, the necessary "closure" that made the September events intelligible.

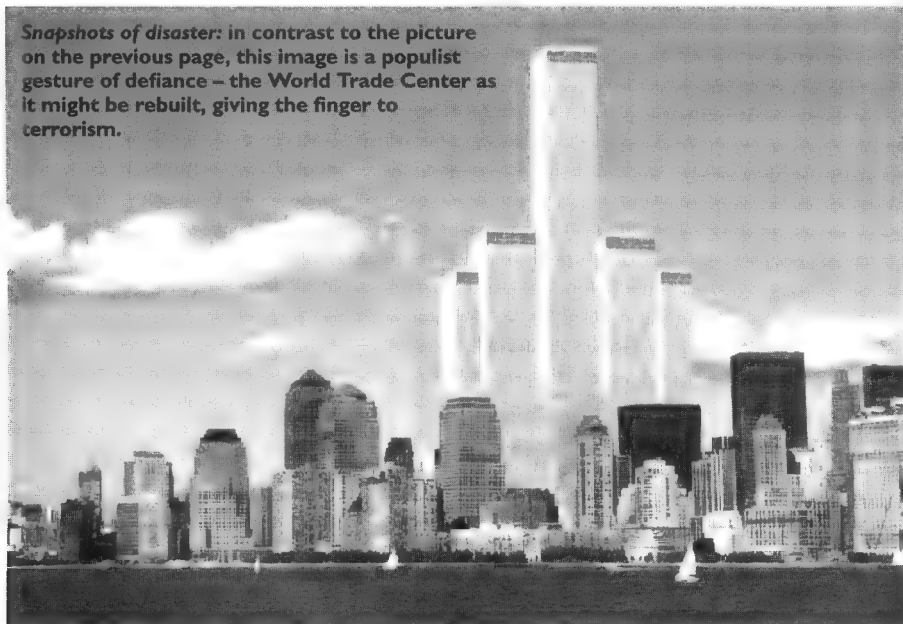
As a simile ("it was like science fiction, only real") sf was contained in the realm of the fictional that could then be juxtaposed with reality. The conventions of sf seemed relatively safe and made reality seem all the riskier.

Like sf, the news media are institutionalized risk environments for readers, viewers and media professionals. It was not only audiences who risked "flooding out"; news reporters also did. As *The Sun* (12 Sep 01) reported, "stunned TV broadcasters" struggled to keep their composure and find words as the drama unfolded. One uttered: "It looks like Hollywood. But it's not. It's not unfair to say it's Armageddon." Comparisons with Hollywood and the biblical apocalypse are a form of hyperbole and, as such, signal to audiences the possibility that the reporter is, or is on the verge of, "flooding out."

By seeking out risky futures, the news media open themselves up to the possibility of experiencing fateful moments of their own. In fact, it seemed as if the events of September 11th were one such moment for the whole of television. Critic Tom Sutcliffe, writing in *The Independent on Sunday* (16 Sep 01: 31), noted that television "momentarily deformed" under the impact of the attacks. This deformation included television schedules. As *BBC News Online* (4 Oct 01) noted, "The extensive coverage... [of the September events] has led to comparisons with the way schedules were cleared following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales." The BBC also silenced its networks for three minutes of mourning.

Schedules are television's life plan and a way for television programmers

Snapshots of disaster: in contrast to the picture on the previous page, this image is a populist gesture of defiance – the World Trade Center as it might be rebuilt, giving the finger to terrorism.



to manage risk by colonising the future. Catastrophes can disrupt television schedules while such disruption is a way television dramatizes catastrophe. It was these aspects that were exploited by Orson Welles, who used staged interruptions to radio schedules as a way of authenticating a Martian invasion of Earth in his adaptation of H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*.

The art of scheduling does attempt to routinise disruption. This is the case with live coverage of sport where planned-for disruption to other programmes is often signalled in published guides to television schedules. But the September events even impinged on planned disruption. According to a spokeswoman for BBC 1 controller Lorraine Heggessey, the BBC's approach to the death of the Queen Mother would be reviewed to be "in tune with the times," "The way we mark that may be different to the way we mark the premature end of a young life." At 101, the Queen Mother's death would be timely in a way the deaths of the victims of terrorism were not.

Television also manages risk by using standardized programme formats. Fateful moments for television also destabilize these. So Sutcliffe reported, "that part of the schedules which hadn't been demolished was weirdly – sometimes grotesquely – bent out of shape." His examples included *Kilroy* (ex-pat Americans discussed patriotic shock) and *This Morning* (guest Gene Pitney discussed world affairs rather than his nostalgia tour, and the programme's agony aunt discussed the NATO treaty with an anxious housewife). Sutcliffe concluded, "A kind of normality had crept back in with a bout of bickering about the balance and alleged anti-American bias of *Question Time*." Others were less sanguine. *The Sun* (15 Sep 01: 9) reported: "Angry viewers yesterday demanded that BBC bosses sack *Question Time*'s producer – claiming the audience was anti-American and biased towards terrorism." A *Sun* reader added the programme was "inappropriate and badly timed."

Critical moments

Times of disaster are not always times for critical questioning. Different types of commentary have different relationships to fateful moments and are licensed to speak about those moments in different ways. News reportage, "The News," is granted the authority to speak soonest. News reporters must keep an objective distance; "The News" itself is of the moment.

A defining characteristic of radio and television news is its immediacy. This is also crucial to its apparent objectivity. "The News" locates itself in the time of history so, for the news

media, events occur spontaneously and, supposedly, "The News" is a spontaneous reaction to them. Live broadcasts reinforce this. The liveness of television news broadcasts allows us to experience events not just as they are happening but also as we imagine they actually are. Immediacy hides the mediated nature of "The News" and live broadcasts reinforce this.

Science fiction has its own, more distant, temporal relationship to events. Sontag suggests that the time of sf cinema is after the event. Its imagery of disaster is an "emblem of an inadequate response" to news of humanity's doom. In contrast, Peter Nicholls, in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (Orbit), argues: "The most widespread false belief about sf among the general public is that it is the literature of prediction... None of this has prevented sf fans from crowing with delight when an sf writer has made a good guess, and the mythology of sf is full of such examples." In such cases, the proper moment for sf is before the event where it shares what we might call Fortean Time – the time of prophecy.

Science fiction must happen if its status as prophecy is to be fulfilled. But the statement, "science fiction has happened" also marks the limits of sf. When sf becomes fact, its fictions are threatened with redundancy. After the Mariner landings on Mars, it was predicted that stories about Martian civilizations would no longer be written.

The events of September 11th also suggested there is a proper moment for sf to happen. The untimely intervention of the future in the present is an obscenity.

Science fiction's relationship to the present can allow it a critical distance. It extends the literary tradition of creating polemical, satirical, utopian or dystopian societies by distancing these in time and space. Science fiction creates "nowheres" – the future and alien worlds – where criticism of the present can happen. However, in colonizing the future, sf can also produce "cosy catastrophes" that revel in the imagination of disaster and its consequences. The events of September 11th disrupted such cosiness.

It is at times like these that reality happens to sf. What is at stake is more than a good read or a good night at the cinema. Giddens notes that fateful moments can be periods of reskilling and empowerment for individuals. Science fiction can contribute to this by imagining less cosy utopias.

Ian Watson's "Hijack Holiday" is an example: the story is not prediction in the sense that it was prophesying an actual event – "Hijack Holiday" did not happen. However, as a satire, it did posit a time when world politics and fatal events could be experienced

in terms of eroticized commodity aesthetics. The conventions of Hollywood, theme parks and advertising have pervaded the story's central character's experience of reality. This permits him to enjoy the perverse pleasure of his own, spectacular, destruction.

But readers and writers of sf must reflect on the way it uses such scenarios to colonize the future. While "Hijack Holiday" satirises the inauthentic nature of such pleasures, the reality to which they are opposed is merely another Hollywood trope. The basic scenario – Eastern terrorists visit destruction on Western innocents in the name of religion – supports and utilizes conventions learnt from, among other places, films such as *Back to the Future* and *True Lies*.

Watson's story ends by cutting the passenger's stream of consciousness dead: "Oh, this is a holiday of a –"

The dash signals the intervention of reality. Because the story is told from an unreliable first person perspective, reality can only exist outside the text. As long as we remain imprisoned in the character's consciousness, there is nowhere left to go. Any attempt to understand the social, political, economic and cultural complexities that might have given rise to such situations from the story must begin and end with the passenger's own understanding of the situation. Partly, this is because Watson makes his joke work by telling the story from a reactionary's point of view – the hijackers subscribe to a "screwball philosophy" and chant "a mantra of madness." For the moment, we need to question the cost of Watson's choice of perspective, not just for the story's satirical intent.

References to science fiction by the media in their interpretation of the September events were similarly reactionary. Science fiction was press-ganged into the service of moral simplification in which the deaths of individuals were turned into a disaster for the world. For example, *The Mirror*'s front page headline constructed events as a "War on the World" (11 Sep 01).

By anthropomorphizing the world as victim, the September events were represented as a fateful moment for the world, opening it up to a risky future and making it vigilant to signals of danger and alarm. Faced with this, the news also reported various strategies for restoring the world's feelings of trust and security. Here the imagination of disaster again played a part.

As Sontag warned, sf cinema, in its disaster form, can draw on "the oldest romance of all" – the strong invulnerable hero with a mysterious lineage comes to do battle on behalf of good against evil. So some newspapers

summoned up the spectre of James Bond and called for a real-life equivalent to save the day.

Sontag adds that, in the imagination of disaster "one detects the hunger for a 'good war', which poses no moral problems, admits no moral qualms." The shock of the fateful can too easily give rise to such simplifications.

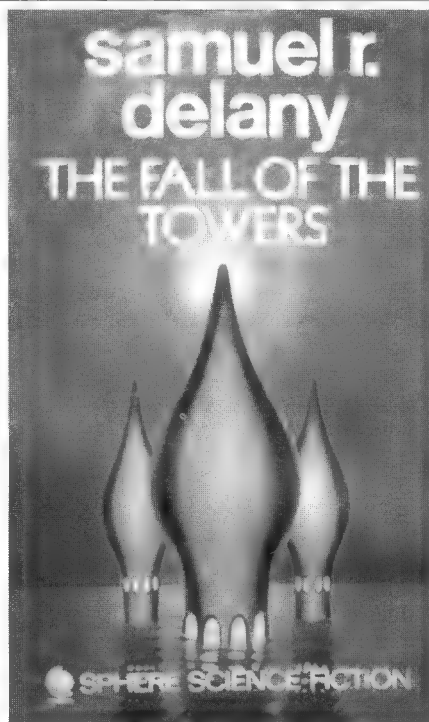
However, Sontag's analysis is itself too simplistic. The imagination of disaster can offer opportunities for criticism. Indeed, disaster has its place in many attempts to theorize radical utopian futures. These include Marx's account of the transition from capitalism to communism ("all that is solid melts into air"), cultural critic Walter Benjamin's account of history in ruins, and Giddens's own account of individual change as a result of the personal disasters of fateful moments. Science fiction is closely related to such imaginings.

Science-fictional time

Today's climate of risk is the result of two transitions; from pre-modern to modern society; and from modern society to the risk society of high modernity. These transitions are marked by the decline of a sacred, pre-ordained future and the opening up of the future as a perceived place for human control.

As the religious world view declined, so the sacred endings that provided humanity with a meaningful sense of closure were also eroded. The moments of judgment day, the second coming, and eternal salvation or damnation were replaced by secular disasters – palaeontology uses extinction events to measure time, while cosmology suggests the causes for such extinctions, and imagines ways in which humankind itself could become extinct.

Such high-consequence events make human life appear inconsequential. Science fiction can be seen both to be contributing to this process, and attempting amelioration. It replaces sacred senses of ending with secular endings that restore the consequentiality of humankind. However, it can never



The 1968 British paperback edition of Delany's early trilogy – with a cover illustration that now seems oddly prescient.

provide a satisfactory point of closure where human life can be made fully meaningful because, like science, sf denies humanity a privileged place in space and time.

The disasters that lie at the heart of sf are the destruction of a divinely ordered universe of an omniscient God, and the destruction of a humane universe imagined by His creation in the wake of His death.

The same imaginings that displace humankind from its privileged position in space and time also allow us to perceive the whole of human history as a mere moment in the history of the universe. In this respect subjectively long periods of human history, such as the transitions from pre-modern-to-modern and modern-to-risk societies, can be seen as fateful moments. These were

moments of decision, including many individual decisions to produce fictions that represented the new sense of time and space. Science fictions were among them.

Science fiction colonizes the future and identifies its own distinctive fateful moments: of invention, of first contact, of conceptual breakthrough and of global and cosmic catastrophe. Sometimes, these fateful moments become occasions when sf falls back on tradition, so the imagined future is colonized by versions of the past – reworkings of the Roman Empire, or the idylls of cosy catastrophes, in which disaster allows the re-establishment of conservative societies. On other occasions, fateful moments can produce more radical futures that question such invented traditions.

If sf is to take its rightful place as the literature of the 21st century, it must continue to replace cosy catastrophes with critical ones. Of course, Gary Westfahl is right to point out (elsewhere in this issue) that individuals and societies fall back on routines. There are strong structures in literature and life that routinize the fateful, and routine is one way security is restored. But at fateful moments, what is to be considered routine is open to question.

In our search for global security, fatefulness can be replaced by an uncritical fatalism in which we look to nation-states to secure and manage trust relations between ourselves and the world. In the face of perceived and real danger, we terrorize ourselves with guestimates of probable risk, and thus allow nation-states to sequester trust in the name of a global Umwelt. In this context, vigilance can become routinized, state-ordered surveillance.

By accepting such routines, or ignoring the fateful when it flashes into memory at a moment of danger, sf also risks abandoning liberty in ruins. In a world where towers have fallen, it is as well to remember that 1984 is also waiting to happen.

Tim Robins



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Here is the successor to a book – *Revelation Space*, Alastair Reynolds's first novel – which needed a sequel. It still does. *Chasm City* (Gollancz, £17.99) is not that sequel. Nor does it intend to be.

Chasm City may be set on the same planet and in the same complicated space-opera universe as its predecessor, and may incorporate occasional nods to the protagonists of that first book, whose stories have become urban legends a few centuries down the line, when this vast new tale begins; but the cosmogonic puzzles left at the end of *Revelation Space* remain unhatched. *Chasm City* has other fish to fry.

Puddle fish? small fry? Maybe, maybe not.

For most of its very considerable length, *Chasm City* unfolds at an exceedingly amiable pace, a sort of relaxa-opera all-stops lope through sagebrush and backstory until we reach the mean-street slums and crannies of the world-city which gives the book its title and is the capitol of Yellowstone, a planet gone old, where the main action is going to take place, we figure. But here the story – a recounting of the first stages of Tanner Mirabel's hunt across the stars to Chasm City chasing a man named Reivich who had gunned down his employer – halts completely for a bit of sightseeing. There is nothing surprising in this (space opera tends to the set-piece; space opera over 500 pages long tends absolutely to the set-piece), for Chasm City, as Reynolds conceives it, is too tempting not to describe at length, for it manifests a future gone ancient, a fine old mess to dabble the pen in.

(There is not, of course, anything inherently dodgy in the thought that the future might in fact be older than the now. One of the more beguiling illusions of 20th-century sf, after all, was the underlying hope or advocacy that the next new thing the world was due to experience would be a *young* new thing. But sometimes a cigar is just a cigar; sometimes the next is just next, and therefore older. We readers too are older, we who have been reading sf for a century or so. And whether or not we've seen it all, we tend to think we have. We have now begun a new century on this planet (this review was written before 2001 was poisoned), and the space operas now being written tend to convey a sense of the antiquity of what's to come; to conduct their tales up the scree of the ruinous weight of the future, into some arena where the past can be held at bay for the length of a story.)

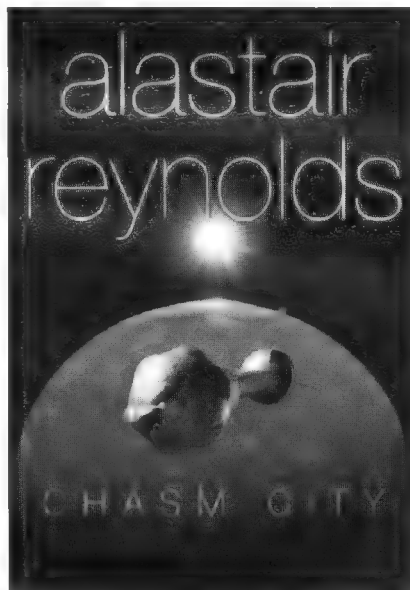
Before the book begins – though long after the time of *Revelation Space* – Chasm City was a vast shining metropolis, a intricate sporulation of the dream of urbanity balanced around the rim of the great rift in the planet from which breathable air and other unguents rise, as though by magic. But

Mean Steam Ahead, and Others

John Clute

a plague – which afflicts all machines, including the nanoware that runs the world – has turned Chasm City into an Escherian topology of slum and slurry, whose geometries stress the eye with wrongness (one of the districts of the transfigured city is indeed named after M.C. Escher). Anything shaped or run by nanoware – from humans with implants to the buildings and arcologies they inhabit – has taken on a quasi-organic torture-garden golem face, the quasi-animate face things take when they are stretched beyond their means. Chasm City is an explosion of bankrupt gesture, hubris without aspiration, parody without point, through which, as the plot advances, flashes of the past chivvy the surface of events like some long multi-storied inchworm glacier under the midden. Chasm City is a surface of slurry piled helter-skelter on top of myth, a garden where stories grow.

It is the best thing Reynolds has done.



REVIEWED

But first we have to get there. This is a problem. Reynolds's protagonist – as we guess very soon after meeting him – is going to be one of those space-opera protagonist guys with a *lot* of identity problems. Tanner Mirabel is haunted by memories of his seemingly dead employer and the traumatic fire-fight that cost so many lives; he is also haunted by a set of inserted memories out of the life of Sky Haussmann, the anti-hero who had founded Tanner's home planet, where the action of *Chasm City* begins so leisurely.

These memories not only arrive in chronological order but impose themselves on Tanner's sensorium *just when* he is going to find the lessons they impart really useful, as though the novel were some sort of godgame, which it isn't, quite. All the same, Tanner – who tells the whole of *Chasm City* in a tough-guy first-person lingo taken from the kind of *noir* private-eye novel usually set in mid-20th century California – is a man desperately in need of help. He is rude, resentful, bullying, haunted, and very very thick. As in default *noir*, he is run from pillar to post by every other character in the book. He guesses *nothing* as fast as his slowest readers will have. He insults and betrays everyone who wants to help him. Like his California models, he struts down the mean-steampunk streets of Chasm City – “A man with a wound, come to our mean streets to right some wrongs?” suggests one of the women who can't resist him – on a knight-errant quest whose idiocy is nearly preternatural (Reivich had killed Tanner's employer for honourable reasons; Tanner takes a slower-than-light ship to another star in order to find a man who does not deserve to be stalked, leaving far behind by this action his own era, his own life, and any meaning inherent in

his quest for revenge.) But just as we are about ready to chuck our dim hero, and Chasm City itself (no matter how intriguingly it has been depicted), we begin to wake up to what Reynolds is on about.

Readers familiar with Iain M. Banks's *Use of Weapons* (1990) may have guessed early on that the dovetailing structure of *Chasm City* was designed to do one main thing: to unravel the musclebound Tanner like an onion. Readers unfamiliar with Banks may have guessed anyway, as Reynolds lays down hints in plenty that Tanner himself is a hide. Tanner Mirabel is thick because he has been *designed* to be thick. Rather like Chasm City itself, he is a thin swab of slurry overlying some very deep story stuff indeed. He is a puppet of the past, an impostor, a dufus. What is using him as a hide and why is what the novel is about.

So it is all right to amble through Chasm City with galoshes-brain. It is all right to gape at the sights, delectate the virtuoso setpieces, enjoy the food, the sex, the rain, the Raymond Chandler, the Mean Steam. It is all right because, in the end, Reynolds drops us down the plumb lines of story into the chasm at the heart of the book, where (just in time) we find out things about Tanner's multiple innards, and about the universe. *Chasm City* is a thick book which was designed to be thick, and to split open.

In the end, it was a joy to fall in.

There are not many characters in *Nekropolis* (Eos, \$24), but they seem thousands. *Nekropolis* is an sf novel about the people who have no faces in most sf novels, and are therefore innumerable, the people whose deaths feed the engines of world-change in sf stories about making it all new. They are the mothers with dying children, the dark-skinned servitors who hide their eyes from owners like us, the grunts, the discards, the serfs, the farmers, the cousin who turns to whoring, the little shopkeepers, the picturesque starvers who jam mean streets around the corner from the world: all those who sweat with fear when the world comes round the corner.

Unlike the protagonists of almost any sf novel, but exactly like the "extras" who populate the Third World, the protagonists of Maureen F. McHugh's fourth novel do not live in the present of history. As a title, *Nekropolis* implies many things about death and belatedness, but its central message may be straightforward: that although the past is a nekropolis, change is another death. The key word here is, perhaps, prison.

McHugh is vague about the exact time of her near-future tale, almost certainly because her several protagonists, through whose successive voices the story is told, are themselves as

ignorant of the cutting edge of "progress" as an Indian peasant in 2001 talking to his aunt in England on a mobile phone. It does not matter what year *Nekropolis* is set in because the precise year of the tale – precision here being a First World concept, a necessary monitoring device if your world's main business is to produce the future – does not interest its cast.

The setting is urban Morocco, part of the North Atlantic Alliance. No trade or diplomatic relations are permitted with the modern world – Europe and the Americas – though a good deal of smuggling of hi-tech devices is covertly encouraged. AI devices proliferate, as do virtual-reality environments for the rich, and cardphones: the kind of Cargo Polynesians were reputed to long for in the 19th century. As in our own time, the streetwise of the Third World trade in Cargo, but live in the shambolic nekropolis of the very same traditional world they were born into, and feed on.

Nekropolis is a tale of the fed upon. It is also a tale of survival. But one thing should be made clear. Although I think I've fairly described the background of *Nekropolis*, that background is almost entirely implicit; without a single polemical outcry, McHugh tells her story as if we had no excuse not understanding, without being told, the point of its world-historical location.

Hariba begins. She is a 25-year-old virgin who has been jessed – a mind-altering process, illegal in the First World, which renders the person so treated inherently loyal to her employer. She works for a rich restaurant owner whose wife comes to hate her. But before she is evicted from his house, she becomes involved with another servant or slave, a *harni* named Akhmim, an AI-driven humanoid whose

nature commands of him a tied responsiveness to the hollow aloneness of the human condition. *Harni*, who are raised in commensal litters, find it a constant torture to be away from their kind; but humans, into whose abyssal holloedness they rise like yeast, give them some sense of function.

After eviction from her master's house, and enforcing bonding/bondage to a new mistress, Hariba runs away from the law, returns to Nekropolis, the part of her home city where the dead were buried long ago, and where the invisibles of the new world continue to live, immured in the fettering complexities of a world they do not quite have enough energy to emigrate from. Akhmim is now narrating. His bondage to Hariba – which is very similar to jessing – makes it impossible for him not to attempt to fill her. He wishes to have sex with her, because sex is "as close as humans ever seem to come to the merging of 'I' and 'other' – the momentary forgetfulness of separation, which isn't the same."

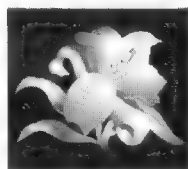
But the bondage of her culture (McHugh utters no feminist arguments, but her portrait of the appalling nekropolis of constraint that women are bonded to, in her dream version of Morocco, needs no bush) keeps Hariba from sex. And the abrogation of her jessing is making her almost fatally ill. Further sections of the story, told through her mother's and her best friend's voices, tie the two protagonists more and more tightly into the necrosis of the given; until it seems they will die.

How they do not in fact die, and the costs of their escape to Spain, constitute the main action, quickly told, of *Nekropolis*. In Spain, Hariba and Akhmim become *evolué*, which is of course another death, another Nekropolis to inhabit. But they are surfacing, for what it's worth, they are coming to the surface of the present tense of the world. AI creatures like Akhmim are called chimera in Spain; he has further climbs to make, but will do so with his fellows, for his bondage to Hariba has now lessened, and they separate after fucking at last. Hariba will become an accountant. To do so, she must cut her hair. "The smooth coil of black hair" – once cut – is topologically identical to the city she has left, the family she has abandoned, the virginity she has finally "surrendered" to Akhmim, all the betrayals of not dying.

Now she lives in the future, with us. Bon voyage.

It is a breathtaking book, whose melancholy is unrinsable; but exhilarated in its telling. The sparseness of McHugh's prose, for she seems never to waste a word, fills from within like a homo sapiens filled with Akhmim, until it all seems pregnant. *Nekropolis* rings like crystal, a precarious sound in a police world. But nothing can be sole or whole without being rent. *Nekropolis* is a book about the cost of living.

MAUREEN F. McHUGH



NEKROPOLIS
BY THE AUTHOR OF MISSION CHILD

When we go down into the world of Kelly Link, we go way down, it is a long journey down to there. "The underworld," she tells us in a story called "The Girl Detective," "is everything I've been telling you." The underworld is Hades, it is memory and desire, it is a cauldron containing all the stories that never quite reached the light because Orpheus looked back. It is all the stories in *Stranger Things Happen* (Small Beer Press, \$16) which contains most of the stories Kelly Link has yet published.

As with the best writers of her generation – those who are now 30 or so and just entering the years of creative pomp – it is very nearly impossible to describe Link's work in terms of the old categories: sf, fantasy, horror, supernatural, gothic... Like her peers (the oldest of them probably being the now hoary Jonathan Lethem, who is at least 37), she knows intimately the genres of old, the genres which sustained us for nearly two centuries and are now in managed care; she knows them, loves them clearly, and uses them with utter ruthlessness to gain her ends.

Whatever those ends may be. I do not think Kelly Link much wishes to be easy to describe. It is possible, however, to suggest a few things she is *not*, so far as the eleven stories here collected, plus the few which have appeared elsewhere, depose. As we've already suggested, they are not sf or fantasy or horror, in any traditional sense. They do not display much of the doctrinal coherence of mimetic realism; nor do they play gingerly with isms (surrealism, magic realism, postmodernism, jism ism) after the fashion of *noli me tangere* writers of the late 20th century like John Updike or Stephen Millhauser (one is now increasingly inclined to call them authors of Fine Fiction). And although they deal with situations of profound anxiety, her stories are not *anxious*.

This is important. For the past couple of centuries, the authors of the Western World have wrestled like Laocoons with what Harold Bloom neatly and definitely termed "the anxiety of influence," that harried wrestling of the children – in a Late Culture like ours, anyone alive is a child – with the mothers and fathers of Western literature, who *had already done it*, had already said everything first. The writers of 1950 are still caught in the coils of trying to say it new, and their work reeks of the anxiety that they are just regurgitating Ma and Pa. In 2001, Link's work borrows from everywhere, from every parent imaginable, and it doesn't give a stuff.

Take "Shoe and Marriage" (2000), a loose meditation on the isomorphies of Fetish and Love, whose changing glyphs pop up like islets in the chan-

nels of desire, where they are cleansed, maybe. It is in three main parts. Part One reads a bit like a revisionist fantasy by (say) Angela Carter, or (maybe) Karen Joy Fowler: a prince juggles his love for the large-footed cinder maiden he married, and his obsession with tiny feet. Part Two reads like (say) Donald Barthelme: in a honeymoon suite, newlyweds watch a beauty contest on tv. The various contestants are a lexicon bricolage of postmodern strangenesses of modern America:

Miss Virginia and Miss Michigan are Siamese twins. Miss Maryland wants to be in Broadway musicals. Miss Montana is an arsonist. She is in love with fire. Miss Texas is a professional hit woman. She performs exorcisms on the side. She says that she is keeping her eye on Miss New Jersey.

It is all hilarious, forgiving, wise.

Part Three reads a bit like Steve Erickson, or like one of the less well-known European fabulists, Villy Sorensen perhaps: the widow of a dictator, who may be the dictator in disguise, performs herself daily in the shoe museum dedicated to her tyrant husband's memory. And there is a tiny Part Four, told in clear: a fortune teller reads the shoes of a young married couple, tells them that they will be all right, that they will be "comfortable together, like a pair of old shoes."

None of it exactly adds up, because the story is exactly more than the sum of its parts. Others, like the brilliant "Louise's Ghost" (new to this volume), are more straightforward: two women named Louise sort, and fail to sort, their lives; the last moment of the tale, when they are together again in memory, all the things that add their lives

up coming together in a pair together, is far more moving than the words that tell it.

But most of *Stranger Things Happen*, as the title indicates, moves in the other direction, towards stories that eschew any resolution of story and discourse, beginning and end. Indeed, many of them – "Water off a Black Dog's Back" (1995); "The Specialist's Hat" (1998), which won a 1999 World Fantasy Award; "Flying Lessons" (1995); "Travels with the Snow Queen" (1996), which won a 1997 James Tiptree Jr Award; "Survivor's Ball; or, The Donner Party" (1998) – end as though, in the final words of one of them, to end the written part of a story is to step "off the edge of the known world."

In this Link is a bit like Jonathan Carroll, the seeming incoherence of whose endings may well be deliberate; but there is one writer above all whose example (whether directly or not I have no idea) she seems to have absorbed to the uttermost. This is the British writer Robert Aickman (1914-1981), whose "Strange Stories" also carry the reader from normal-seeming outsets into disruptive end sequences which do not add up. Aickman is very quiet about this; his stories are secret devastations of our presumption that stories have endings, that lives add up, that (in the end) we can even begin to understand the stories that are telling us.

Kelly Link is much noisier than Aickman. She incorporates fairy tales, with all their clattering baggage, into the understories of most of her work; she has available a wide range of story-pregnant takes of American life in the new century; she obsessively (or mischievously) plays with Body Parts (*lots* of her protagonists are missing bits) and unpleasant dogs (who incessantly haunt the background of the stories collected here); her protagonists, most of them female, treat sex with redeeming casual frankness; she is bright, supple, haunted, dark, and only cruel when (occasionally) she loses control.

But, in the end, like Aickman, and with a similar valiant gaiety of mien, Link is a storyteller about the end of Story. For most writers, storylines are a kind of Ariadne's Thread; they lead us out of darkness into the light. For Aickman, and for Link, it is the reverse; for them, after centuries of stories, so many stories it is maybe impossible to tell a new one, it is time to reverse the thread. Time to unravel the skin of story.

Behind the last word (Kelly Link says) is the old dark.

John Clute



The above reviews were first published electronically in *SF Weekly* at www.scifi.com/sfw. Some changes have been made for their first print appearance in *Interzone*.



An ambitious new magazine bursts onto the stands. **Black Gate: Adventures in Fantasy Literature** (New Epoch Press \$7.99) stakes out all fantasy in the

printed form as its territory, leaving aside only the fantasy found in television, movies and computer games. This wide brief means it offers fiction, some comic strips and interviews, along with reviews of books, comics and role playing games. Whew!

Black Gate, in the words of publisher and editor John O'Neill, "is primarily owned by a small group of fans from Ottawa, Canada, who also founded a local ISP." This ISP grew into the hosting domain for some of the biggest websites in the genre (including *Asimov's*, *F&SF*, *Analog*, DNA publications, and our very own *Interzone*). Eventually, O'Neill "left the SF Site to pursue the dream of founding a fiction magazine." In issue 1, he states that "without a vibrant magazine culture, a genre has no centre."

The title *Black Gate* is a reference to the black gate of Hades, guarded by the three-headed dog Cerberus, although the contents of issue 2 (Summer 2001) go beyond the supernatural and range across many aspects of fantasy literature.

The first thing to mention is the magazine's size. Does size matter? As a first impression, the 7"x 10" size of issue 2, along with its 1/8" thickness, gives *Black Gate* a wonderful retro feel. It actually matches the dimensions of a 1934 copy of *Wonder Stories* which I have – a pulp magazine from the Gernsback era. The paper quality of *Black Gate* is superior of course – this isn't a pulp magazine – but it's an attempt to revive the species in a modern context. The last time this was tried was with the earlier revived *Weird Tales* under Scithers and Schweitzer. *Black Gate* owes more than a nod to the original *Weird Tales*, and resembles that venerable magazine. That's no complaint.

Incidentally, issue 1 of *Black Gate* is slightly larger than 2, but this was due to printer's error. The 7"x10" "pulp" size is the official one.

At 224 pages, issue 2 packs a lot in. It features 10 short stories, including a *Weird Tales* reprint from 1926. This is a real treat: Edmond Hamilton's first published story "The Monster-God of Mamurth." At first glance, it's the classic "idiot" plot (in which Our Hero acts like an idiot: "Don't go over there; it's full of monsters!") So where does he go...?, but Hamilton's skilful writing lifts the story enough to be an enjoyable romp in the horror zeitgeist of yesteryear. What *Black Gate* adds is an impressive attention to detail taken in story presentation. Along with four new illustrations and author

Another Gateway

Nigel Brown

photo, there are text sidebars relating a short biography and bibliography of Hamilton, together with photos of selected Hamilton book and pulp magazine covers.

Memorable among the other nine stories is "Goyle in the Hood" by Nebula Award winner Leslie What. This vampire tale features two gargoyles who guard the sanctuary of their vampire mistress. They're in trouble, as they no longer command terror – children are now used to seeing monsters in cartoons all the time "because of men like Disney." This quirky story should appeal to the *Buffy* generation as an original twist in a sub-genre in danger of becoming passé.

Other stories of note include "Pity the Poor Dybbuk" by Steve Carper and "Heart of Jade" by Amy Sterling Casil. Both are set outside the USA, the first in Japanese-occupied Shang-

hai when a Prussian-Jewish refugee has encounters with demons, both Jewish and Chinese. Amy Sterling Casil's story traces the destruction of pre-Columbian Mayan culture, seen through the eyes of a feisty Mayan Princess and an artisan who makes an unlikely, but credible hero. Both stories refuse to rely on an exotic locale for interest; they paint fascinating responses from individuals to supernatural events which are accepted as the norm outside American culture.

As with the Ed Hamilton reprint, all the fiction is accompanied by three or four illustrations per story. The effect of this, together with author photos and cover reproductions of other works by the authors, is to emphasize that *Black Gate* goes beyond a fiction magazine. Indeed, a third of issue 2 consists of articles, reviews, columns and a Gene Wolfe interview by Jayme Lynn Blaschke.

As promised in the editorial, *Black Gate* is on a mission to inform – all the stops are pulled out, starting with an article on "Building the Fantasy Canon: The Classic Anthologies of Genre Fantasy" by Richard Horton. Apart from giving a sense of historical perspective to this new magazine, it provides a useful reference for those interested in reading more genre fantasy.

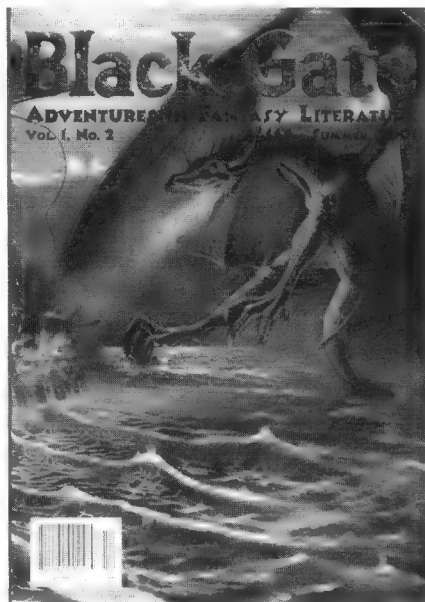
And so to comics. Claude Lalumière presents a comprehensive survey of the work of British writer Alan Moore, and two comic strips, just six pages between them, are offered at the back of the magazine. Although comics are arguably part of the broad sweep of fantasy literature, these items open the door into such a vast arena that they're useful only if they encourage a general readership to seek out more in this field. Too many other specialized magazines exist these days for the keen panelologist.

Whilst we're being churlish, a letters column wouldn't go amiss. It helps create an identity for a magazine, a forum where fellow readers can meet and add to the magazine's personality.

So does *Black Gate* deliver? In spades! Issue 1 featured fiction from Michael Moorcock (an excerpt from his novel *The Dreamthief's Daughter*, Book One, a variant of that featured in *Interzone* 151, January 2000) and issue 3 promises work from Mike Resnick and Darrell Schweitzer. It clearly intends to be a professional player in the field.

Being distributed to most major bookstores in North America (including Borders, Waldenbooks and Barnes & Noble), this new gateway into fantasy has a good chance of introducing new readers to the genre – I look forward to future issues.

Nigel Brown



This is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Asaro, Catherine. **Spherical Harmonic**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-89063-X, 428pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the seventh in the "Saga of the Skolian Empire" series, it's described as "a unique blend of hard science fiction and heartrending romance.") December 2001.

Ballard, J. G. **The Complete Short Stories**. Flamingo, ISBN 0-00-712405-8, ix+1189pp, hardcover, £25. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; this magnificent 1200-page tome is bigger than the recent *Collected Stories* of Arthur C. Clarke [see below], but despite its size, it's not truly complete; only four previously uncollected stories have been included – "The Recognition" [1967] and "A Guide to Virtual Death," "The Message from Mars" and "Report from an Obscure Planet" [all 1992]; it also contains a new one-page introduction by the author [but no story-headers or notes] and a simple three-page bibliography at the rear, stating where and when each story first appeared; highly recommended; since neither "The Secret Autobiography..." nor "The Dying Fall" has been included, this means that *Interzone* 106 [April 1996], our special JGB issue, which contained both those stories plus some interesting non-fiction, remains a must-have item for Ballard completists.) 5th November 2001.

Banker, Ashok. **The Pocket Essential Bollywood**. "Pocket Essentials Film." Pocket Essentials [18 Coleswood Rd., Harpenden, Herts. AL5 1EQ], ISBN 1-903047-45-5, 93pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Unillustrated guide to the movies, many of them fantasies, produced by Bombay's Hindi-language film industry; first edition; the Bombay-based author, Ashok Banker, has had two stories published in *Interzone* and has recently sold a trilogy of fantasy novels to UK and US publishers; meanwhile, this informative little volume is his first book to appear in the west – another useful addition to this ever-expanding, value-for-money series on the popular arts.) October 2001.

Barnes, John. **The Merchants of Souls**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-89076-1, 398pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's described as "the continuation of the interstellar epic begun in the award-winning *A Million Open Doors* and *Earth Made of Glass*.") December 2001.

Bester, Alfred. **The Stars My Destination**. Introduction by Neil Gaiman. "SF Masterworks, IV." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07337-3, x+258pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK as *Tiger!* 1956, and in the USA under its present title, 1957; previously issued as a B-format paperback in 1999 as "SF Masterworks, 5," this is one of a remarkable set of ten sf clas-

sic hardbacks all published on the same date and numbered [or, in this case, renumbered] in Roman fashion, I-X.) 25th October 2001.

Borchardt, Alice. **The Wolf King**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648387-9, 375pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Historical horror/romantic novel, first published in the USA, 2001; follow-up to *The Silver Wolf* [1998] and *Night of the Wolf* [1999]; the author is the sister of bestselling novelist Anne Rice.) 19th November 2001.

Bradbury, Ray. **From the Dust Returned: A Family Remembrance**. Earthlight, ISBN 0-7432-0759-9, xi+204pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Fantasy fix-up novel, first published in the USA, 2001; proof copy received; like several other Bradbury novels over the decades, it's essentially a cobbling-together, with new material, of old short stories – in this case, his tales of the weird and wizardly Elliott family: "The Traveller" [1946], "Homecoming" [1946], "Uncle Einar" [1947], "The April Witch" [1952], "On the Orient North" [1988] and "West of October" [1988]; interestingly, Bradbury states in his afterword that he originally conceived the book as a collaboration with the late cartoonist of *New Yorker* fame, Charles Addams.) 31st October 2001.

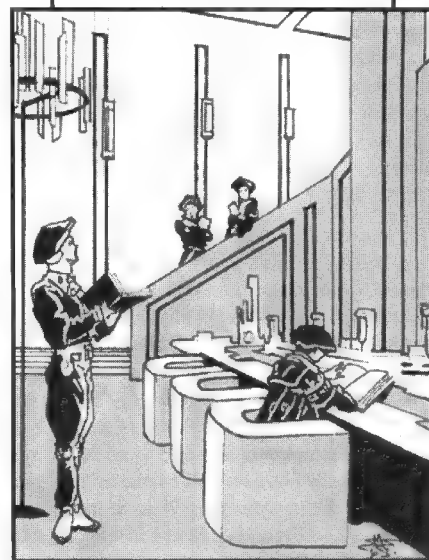
Cady, Jack. **The Hauntings of Hood Canal**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-28079-3, 306pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Horror novel, first edition.) 19th October 2001.

Card, Orson Scott, ed. **Masterpieces: The Best Science Fiction of the Century**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00864-X, x+422pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; it's co-copyright "Tekno Books," which means it's a Martin H. Greenberg anthology [his ten-thousandth? – well, maybe not far off]; it contains all-reprint stories by such well-known names as Brian Aldiss, Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov, James Blish, C. J. Cherryh, Arthur C. Clarke, John Crowley, Harlan Ellison, William Gibson, Robert A. Heinlein, Ursula K. Le Guin, George R. R. Martin, Larry Niven, Frederik Pohl, Robert Silverberg, Theodore Sturgeon and Harry Turtledove; the earliest story – "Devolution" by Edmond Hamilton – dates from 1936, and then there's a large chronological jump to the next-oldest story, Ray Bradbury's "Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed" [1949]; so really, despite its sub-title, the book covers mainly the second half of the century just ended.) November 2001.

Cherryh, C. J. **Defender**. "The thrilling sequel to *Precursor*." DAW, ISBN 0-88677-911-1, 314pp, hardcover, cover by Stephen Youll, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; latest in the author's "Foreigner Universe" series of thoughtful space operas, of which the previous titles – all one-worders and therefore hard to tell apart in the memory – were *Foreigner*, *Invader*, *Inheritor* and *Precursor*.) November 2001.

Clarke, Arthur C. **Childhood's End**. "SF Masterworks, VI." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07263-6, 200pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1953; not previously issued in the B-format "SF Masterworks" series [presumably

BOOKS RECEIVED



OCTOBER 2001

because Pan Books still hold the paperback rights?], this is one of a set of ten sf classic hardbacks all published by Orion/Gollancz on the same date and numbered in Roman fashion, I-X.) 25th October 2001.

Clarke, Arthur C. **The Collected Stories**. Gollancz, ISBN 1-85798-323-8, x+966pp, B-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf collection, first published in the UK, 2001; this is a single-volume gathering, with a two-page foreword and story-headers, of all Clarke's short stories, from "Travel by Wire," which first appeared in a fanzine called *Amateur Science Fiction Stories* in December 1937, through to "Improving the Neighbourhood," a two-page squib from *Nature*, 4th November 1999; in between those rather slight topping-and-tailing efforts, there's much solid, classic sf here, most of it previously collected in various volumes; this tome represents a very significant part of a long lifetime's work – recommended; behind-the-scenes word has it that this first paperback edition has been carefully corrected by copy-editor Hugh Lamb, to eliminate typos and other minor errors which crept into the hardcover first edition.) 18th October 2001.

Cullum, Janice A. **Lyskarian: The Song of the Wind**. "The Chronicles of Karionin." Edge [PO Box 1714, Calgary, Alberta T2P 2L7, Canada], ISBN 1-894063-02-3, 342pp, trade paperback, \$13.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; this big book from a small press appears to be a debut novel by a new Canadian author of mature years [born 1944]; fellow Canadian writer Marie Jakober describes it as "a richly textured novel full of marvellous adventure.") November 2001.

Dick, Philip K. **The Man in the High Castle**. "SF Masterworks, III." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-

07335-7, 249pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1962; not previously issued in the B-format "SF Masterworks" series [presumably because Penguin Books still hold the paperback rights], this is one of a set of ten sf classic hardbacks all published by Orion/Gollancz on the same date and numbered in Roman fashion, I-X.) 25th October 2001.

[Dicks, Terrance, and others.] **Doctor Who: The Scripts.** Introduction by Dicks. "Full Scripts for Tom Baker's First Season." BBC, 0-563-53815-5, 368pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf TV-series script collection, first edition; what is apparently meant to be the book's full title, given on the cover but not on the title page, is *Doctor Who: The Scripts, Tom Baker, 1974/5*; it consists of the scripts of five short serials – "Robot," "The Ark in Space," "The Sontaran Experiment," "Genesis of the Daleks" and "Revenge of the Cybermen" – written respectively by Terrance Dicks, Robert Holmes, Bob Baker & Dave Martin, Terry Nation, and Gerry Davis; "additional text" for this volume is copyrighted to Justin Richards and Andrew Pixley, but they are not named on title page or cover as its editors [although they undoubtedly are].) 18th October 2001.

Donaldson, Stephen R. **The Man Who Fought Alone.** Tor/Forge, ISBN 0-765-30202-0, 463pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Mainstream [?] novel by a leading American fantasy author, first edition; proof copy received; it's about "a wounded hero's struggle for redemption" in the "dark night of the soul," but the publishers don't actually state that it's a fantasy – and it looks as though it probably isn't.) November 2001.

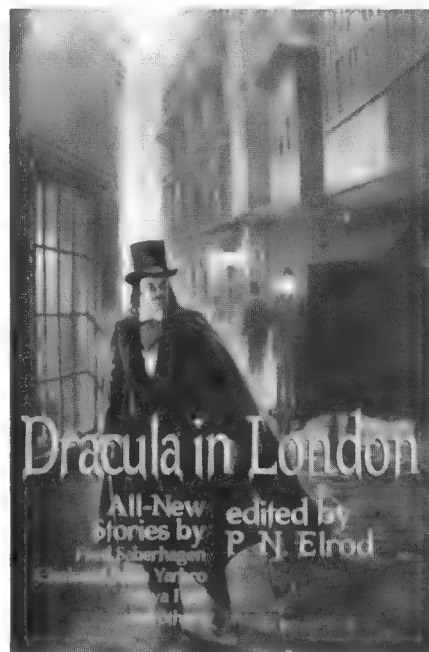
Elrod, P. N., ed. **Dracula in London.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00858-5, vi+263pp, trade paperback, cover by Bill Dodge, \$14.95. (Horror anthology, first edition; it's co-copyright "Tekno Books," which means it's yet another Martin H. Greenberg anthology [see under Orson Scott Card, above]; it contains 16 all-new "gaslight" fantasies featuring Count Dracula and set in 1890s London, by Nigel Bennett [a TV actor, and one of only two Britishers in the book], Elaine Bergstrom, Gary A. Braunbeck, Roxanne Longstreet Conrad, Gene DeWeese, Tanya Huff, Nancy Kilpatrick, Jody Lynn Nye, Judith Proctor [the other Britisher], Fred Saberhagen, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro and others; he may not be Undead, but old Bram Stoker is surely squirming in his grave...) November 2001.

Fane-Saunders, Kilmeny, ed. **Radio Times Guide to Science Fiction.** Introduction by Brian W. Aldiss. BBC Worldwide, 0-563-53460-5, 496pp, trade paperback, cover by Max Ellis, £18.99. (Illustrated A-Z encyclopedia of film, television and radio sf and fantasy, first edition; it really should have been called "Guide to Media Science Fiction and Fantasy" since it does not cover the written word, but it includes the likes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; whatever, it's a physically heavy book, with copious small-print detail, and includes coverage of "more than 1,500 films from the silent

era to the 21st century... more than 300 television series, serials and dramas... [and] highlights from science-fiction radio broadcasting over eight decades"; it's also comprehensively indexed by director, actor and scriptwriter – which may prove a useful feature; text contributors include Allen Eyles, David J. Howe, Tom Hutchinson, Alan Jones and Kim Newman, among many others.) 11th October 2001.

Farmer, Philip José. **The Image of the Beast. Blown.** Creation Books [4th Floor, 72-80 Leather Lane, London EC1N 7TR], ISBN 1-84068-028-8, 319pp, C-format paperback, cover by John Coulthart, £9.95. (Erotic horror omnibus, first edition in this form; it consists of two novels, *The Image of the Beast: An Exorcism, Ritual One* and *Blown: Sketches Among the Ruins of My Mind: An Exorcism, Ritual Two*, first published separately in the USA in 1968 and 1969 by a California-based hardcore pornography house; they are also known as the "Herald Child" sequence – that being the name of the private-eye hero; our recollection of these books is that the first was darkly powerful, startling stuff, while the second, more comical in tone, was much inferior and obviously written in haste to fulfil a contract; the latter novel features real-life sf "superfan" Forrest J. Ackerman as a character; this edition gives no indication of the books' age, and the copyright is assigned to "Ralph M. Vicinanza Ltd, 2001" [Mr Vicinanza is presumably the author's agent]; for further information, see the publishers' website: www.creation-books.com.) 12th November 2001.

Gemmell, David A. **Drenai Tales, Volume One: Legend, The King Beyond the Gate, Waylander.** Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-131-4, 759pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £20. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition; there is a simultaneous C-format paperback edition priced at £12.99 [not seen]; the three named novels first appeared separately in the UK, 1984-1986.) 1st November 2001.



Green, Simon R. **Shadows Fall.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05711-4, 506pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Sullivan, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1994.) 11th October 2001.

Greenberg, Martin H., and Larry Segriff, eds. **Past Imperfect.** DAW, ISBN 0-7564-0012-0, 314pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Warner, \$6.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; it contains 12 all-new tales on the themes of time travel and time paradoxes, by Peter Crowther, Diane Duane, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, James P. Hogan, William H. Keith, Jr., Jane Lindskold, Jody Lynn Nye, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Dean Wesley Smith and others; it's another of a long series of such paperback-original sf, fantasy and horror anthologies produced under Greenberg's aegis for DAW Books; as we've said before, since they seem to appear monthly, consist of all-original material, offer opportunities to new writers, and are cheaply published [in today's terms], it's tempting to think of this sequence of books as constituting a latter-day pulp magazine – each "issue" of which is pleasingly thick, just as the early pulps were.) October 2001.

Haber, Karen, ed. **Meditations on Middle-earth.** "New writings on the worlds of J. R. R. Tolkien." Illustrated by John Howe. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-27536-6, xvi+235pp, hardcover, cover by Howe, \$24.95. (Essay anthology devoted to Tolkien's fantasy, first edition; obviously timed to coincide with the release of the new film of *The Lord of the Rings* [although not an official tie-in], this is a packaged book from Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc., illustrated throughout with black-and-white pencil drawings by Canadian artist and Tolkien specialist Howe; it contains a rather variable gathering of newly-commissioned essays by Poul Anderson [recently deceased – and the book is dedicated to his memory], Orson Scott Card, Charles de Lint, Raymond E. Feist, Esther Friesner, "Robin Hobb," Lisa Goldstein, Ursula Le Guin, George R. R. Martin, Terry Pratchett, Michael Swanwick, Harry Turtledove, Terry Windling and others; one of the most solid and well-informed pieces is by Tolkien critic and editor Douglas A. Anderson; ironically, given Tolkien's extreme "Englishness," only Mr Pratchett flies the flag for the UK – whereas most of the others go on about how they first read Tolkien as suburban American teenagers in the Ace or Ballantine paperback editions of 30-some years ago, Pratchett [who first read Tolkien in hardcover in 1961] is able to say things like: "I can remember the vision of beech woods in the Shire; I was a country boy, and the hobbits were walking through a landscape which, give or take the odd housing development, was pretty much the one I'd grown up in.") 13th November 2001.

Haldeman, Joe. **The Forever War.** "SF Masterworks, IX." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07318-7, 254pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1974; a Hugo and Nebula award-winner in its day, this edition has a two-page "Author's

Note" and contains a revised version of the text which first appeared in America in 1991; previously issued as a B-format paperback in 1999 as "SF Masterworks, 1," this is one of a set of ten sf classic hardbacks all published on the same date and renumbered in Roman fashion.) 25th October 2001.

Harrison, Harry. **The Stainless Steel Rat Joins the Circus.** Gollancz, ISBN 1-85798-724-1, 269pp, A-format paperback, cover by Andy Parker, £5.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1999; the latest Slippery Jim diGriz adventure, in a series which has been running since 1961.) 11th October 2001.

Harrison, M. John. **Travel Arrangements: Short Stories.** Flamingo, ISBN 0-00-654603-X, 262pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf-fantasy-mainstream collection, first published in the UK, 2000; Harrison's first collection since *The Ice Monkey* [1983], it contains 14 stories reprinted from sources as disparate as the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Women's Journal*, *Fantasy & Science Fiction* and *Interzone* – from the last-named come two stories, "Anima" [1992] and "The East" [1999]; reviewed by David Mathew in *IZ* 162.) 19th November 2001.

Heinlein, Robert A. **The Moon is a Harsh Mistress.** "SF Masterworks, VII." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07336-5, 382pp, hardcover, cover by Chris Moore, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1966; not previously issued in the B-format "SF Masterworks" series [presumably because New English Library still holds the paperback rights?], this is one of a set of ten sf classic hardbacks all published by Orion/Gollancz on the same date and numbered in Roman fashion.) 25th October 2001.

Hellekson, Karen L. **The Science Fiction of Cordwainer Smith.** McFarland, ISBN 0-7864-1149-X, vii+158pp, trade paperback, \$28.50. (Critical study of a major American sf author, first edition; sterling-priced import copies should be available in Britain from Shelving Ltd, 4 Pleydell Gdns., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN; "Cordwainer Smith" was a pseudonym for Paul M. A. Linebarger [1913-1966], who was one of US sf's more unusual and fascinating characters; his work continues to provoke discussion, decades on: the author of this short and rather basic study [revised from an academic thesis of 1991] was born in the year of her subject's death, 1966.) December 2001.

Herbert, Frank. **Dune.** "SF Masterworks, I." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07334-9, 445pp, hardcover, cover by John Schoenherr, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1965; not previously issued in the B-format "SF Masterworks" series [presumably because New English Library still holds the paperback rights?], this is one of a set of ten sf classic hardbacks all published by Orion/Gollancz on the same date and numbered in Roman fashion.) 25th October 2001.

Howe, David J., Len Maynard and Mick Sims, eds. **F20: Issue Two.** Illustrated by Bob Covington and others. Enigmatic Press/BFS Publications [3 Tamworth Close, Reading RG6 4EQ], ISBN 0-9524153-9-9, 102pp, small-press

paperback, £7.99. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; it's described as the second of a series of annual anthologies, but we don't recall seeing the first [nor is the rather meaningless title, *F20*, explained]; it contains seven all-new stories by an all-female, all-British line up: Suzanne J. Barbieri, Storm Constantine, Louise Cooper, Juliet E. McKenna, Justina Robson, Freda Warrington and Jane Welch; it's a nicely-produced small book, if somewhat lacking in the title department; the BFS website – www.britishtantasysociety.com – may carry further ordering information.) No date shown: received in October 2001.

Jones, Neil, and David Pringle, eds. **Deathwing.** "Warhammer 40,000 Stories." [2nd edition.] Games Workshop/Black Library [Willow Rd., Lenton, Nottingham NG7 2WS], ISBN 1-84154-154-0, 283pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Dainton, £5.99. (Sf/fantasy role-playing game spinoff anthology; the first edition was published in the UK, 1990; it contains stories, all set in the far-future universe of the dark-hued "Warhammer 40K" game, by Storm Constantine, William King [twice], Neil McIntosh, Charles Stross and Ian Watson [twice]; three stories, by newer writers Dan Abnett, Graham McNeill and Gav Thorpe, have been added to this edition [all are reprinted from *GW's Inferno* magazine]; note: although it still bears our names as co-editors neither Neil Jones nor I had anything to do with this second edition, which has been re-edited by other hands – David Pringle.) November 2001.

Jones, Stephen, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror: Volume Twelve.** Robinson, ISBN 1-84119-292-9, xi+494pp, B-format paperback, cover by Les Edwards, £6.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains reprint stories, all from the year 2000, by Ramsey Campbell, Dennis Etchison, Christopher Fowler, Mick Garris, Graham Joyce, Caitlin R. Kiernan, Kathe Koja, Terry Lamsley, Joel Lane, Tim Lebbon, Thomas Ligotti, Paul J.

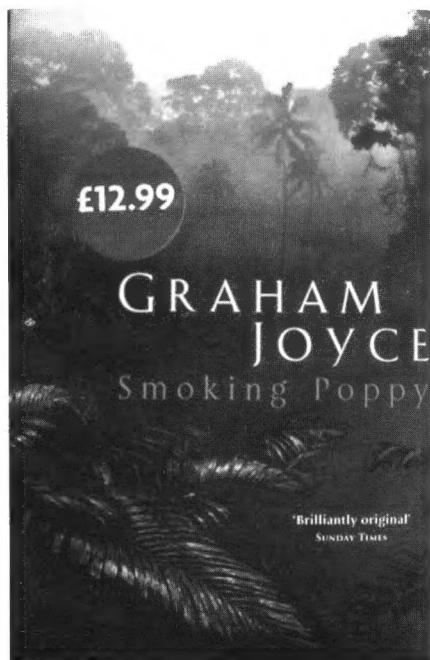
McAuley, Mark Morris, Kim Newman [two stories], Nicholas Royle, Iain Sinclair, Michael Marshall Smith, Steve Rasnic Tem and others [alas, none of this year's stories are selected from *Interzone*]; there's also a very long introduction and the usual detailed "necrology"; unfortunately, we did not receive a review copy of last year's anthology in this series, *The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror: Volume Eleven*; recommended.) 25th October 2001.

Jones, Stephen, and David Sutton, eds. **Dark Terrors 5: The Gollancz Book of Horror.** Gollancz, ISBN 1-85798-322-X, xi+562pp, B-format paperback, cover by Bill Sienkewicz, £6.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the UK, 2000; the preceding volume, *Dark Terrors 4*, came out in 1998, but this volume is over 200 pages longer; it contains all-new stories by Chaz Brenchley, Eric Brown, Ramsey Campbell, David Case, Dennis Etchison, Christopher Fowler, Mick Garris, Brian Hodge, Gwyneth Jones, Caitlin R. Kiernan, Nancy Kilpatrick, Joel Lane, Roberta Lannes, Tanith Lee, Graham Masterton, Richard Christian Matheson, Kim Newman, Nicholas Royle, David J. Schow, Michael Marshall Smith, Brian Stableford, Peter Straub, Melanie Tem, Mary A. Turzillo, Lisa Tuttle, Cherry Wilder and others; a powerful line-up; reviewed by Matt Colborn in *Interzone* 165.) 26th October 2001.

Jordan, Robert. **Winter's Heart: Book Nine of The Wheel of Time.** "The international no. 1 bestseller." Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-071-7, 691pp, A-format paperback, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, £7.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2000; "Robert Jordan" is a pseudonym for James Rigney, Jr., who now seems to have incorporated himself as "the Bandersnatch Group, Inc." – in which name the book is copyrighted.) 1st November 2001.

Joyce, Graham. **Smoking Poppy.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07229-6, 227pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Mainstream/horror [?] novel, first edition; Graham Joyce, the publishers remind us, is a four-times winner of the British Fantasy Award for Best Novel; released at a bargain price, this is his first full-length novel for his new publisher, Gollancz; set in Thailand, it's described as "The Beach meets Heart of Darkness... a moving and sometimes funny portrait of a man's search for his meaning of life"; the fantasy content appears to be slight – possibly limited to some drug delusions.) 18th October 2001.

Kiernan, Caitlin R. **Threshold: A Novel of Deep Time.** Roc, ISBN 0-451-45858-3, 259pp, trade paperback, \$14. (Horror novel, first edition; Kiernan is a newish American writer, resident in Alabama, who has been building a strong reputation with her short stories in many anthologies; decorated with approving quotes from Clive Barker, Neil Gaiman and Peter Straub, this is her second novel – but unfortunately we never saw her first, *Silk* [1998], which was a finalist for the Bram Stoker Award and a winner of various lesser awards.) November 2001.



Lackey, Mercedes. **Take a Thief: A Novel of Valdemar.** DAW, ISBN 0-7564-0008-2, 351pp, hardcover, cover by Jody A. Lee, \$24.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; latest in the vast "Heralds of Valdemar" series, it's dedicated to "the memory of Gordon R. Dickson, gentleman and scholar.") *October 2001.*

Le Guin, Ursula. **The Left Hand of Darkness.** "SF Masterworks, II." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07219-9, 248pp, hardcover, cover by Tim White, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1969; not previously issued in the B-format "SF Masterworks" series [presumably because HarperCollins still hold the paperback rights?], this is one of a set of ten sf classic hardbacks all published by Orion/Gollancz on the same date and numbered in Roman fashion.) *25th October 2001.*

Le Guin, Ursula K. **The Telling.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07258-X, 264pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 2000; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition priced at £16.99 [not seen]; this is the first British edition – unfortunately late in the day, over-sized and with too-large print; it's a new tale in the "acclaimed Hainish cycle"; reviewed from the US first edition by Nick Gevers in *Interzone* 162.) *30th October 2001.*

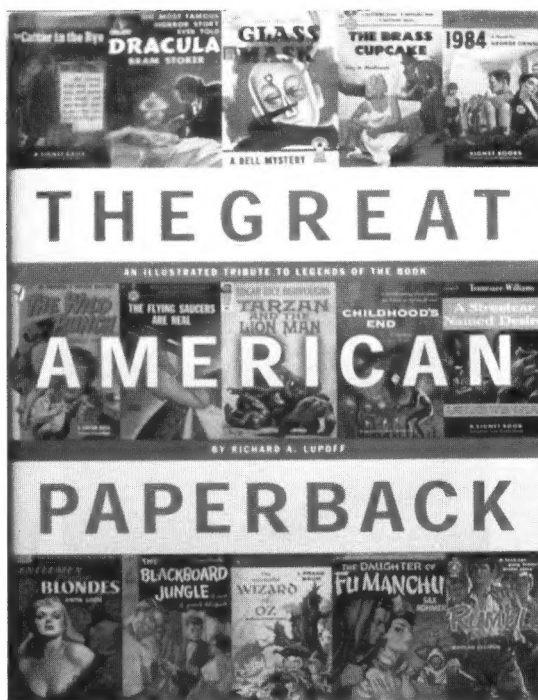
Lewis, C. S. **Out of the Silent Planet.** **Perelandra.** "Voyager Classics." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-711793-0, 400pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Sf omnibus, first edition in this format; the two constituent novels, classics of the British scientific romance [or, in this case, *anti-scientific* romance] were first published separately in the UK in 1938 and 1943; this is the first of the HarperCollins "Voyager Classics" we have seen; a curious list, all issued in non-pictorial dark-blue covers with jacket flaps, they are presumably intended to compete with Orion/Gollancz's B-format "Masterworks" and yellow-covered "SF Collectors' Editions" [but the latter have now been discontinued, so we hear]; according to the list printed opposite the title page, this is no. 14 of the series [although it's not numbered on the cover]; earlier volumes, which we have missed, include T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*, Isaac Asimov's *Foundation*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and William Gibson's *Neuromancer*.) *15th October 2001.*

Little, Denise, ed. **A Constellation of Cats.** DAW, ISBN 0-7564-0016-3, 307pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Hess, \$6.99. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; it contains 13 all-original stories on a fantastical feline theme, by Karen Haber, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Bill McCay, Andre Norton, Jody Lynn Nye, Mary Jo Putney, Mickey Zucker Reichert, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Elizabeth Anne Scarborough and others [including somebody called "Von Jocks"]; although he's not named as co-editor, it's clearly another Martin H. Greenberg production [copyright shared by Tekno Books, which is Greenberg's company]; as such, it's the latest issue

of the Greenberg/DAW Books "pulp" – see comments above, under Greenberg and Segriff.) *November 2001.*

Lovecraft, H. P. **The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories.** Edited by S. T. Joshi. "Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-218003-3, xx+443pp, B-format paperback, cover by Gustave Doré, \$13. (Horror collection, first edition; it contains a dozen pieces, including the short novels "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" and "At the Mountains of Madness"; the extraordinary repackaging of pulpster Howard Phillips Lovecraft [1890-1937] as an acknowledged "classic" of modern literature continues apace: just a few years after the Ballantine/Del Rey three-volume edition of the mid-1990s, which contained all HPL's tales, the American arm of Penguin Books is doing likewise, in handsome editions with meticulously corrected texts introduced and heavily annotated by the leading HPL scholar S. T. Joshi; this is the second Penguin volume – we were not sent the first, which came out in 1999 and was entitled *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*.) *October 2001.*

Lupoff, Richard A. **The Great American Paperback: An Illustrated Tribute to Legends of the Book.** Collectors Press [PO Box 230986, Portland, OR 97281, USA], ISBN 1-888054-50-6, 320pp, hardcover, \$60. (Copiously illustrated history of US mass-market paperbacks; first edition; this is a companion volume to Frank M. Robinson's *Science Fiction of the 20th Century: An Illustrated History* [Collectors Press, 1999], reviewed in *Interzone* 152, and is an equally sumptuous production – the last word in coffee-table books, lavishly produced, with reproductions of over 600 rare paperback covers; sf writer Lupoff's text is well-informed and engaging; recommended; for ordering information, see the publishers' website: www.collectorspress.com.) *October 2001.*



MacLeod, Ken. **Cosmonaut Keep: Engines of Light, Book One.** Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-067-9, xii+385pp, A-format paperback, cover by Lee Gibbons, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 2000; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 166.) *1st November 2001.*

MacLeod, Ken. **Dark Light: Engines of Light, Book Two.** Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-069-5, 292pp, hardcover, cover by Lee Gibbons, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; second in this sequence which the publishers describe as "a major new space opera.") *1st November 2001.*

Miles, Lawrence. **The Adventuress of Henrietta Street.** "Doctor Who." BBC, 0-563-53842-2, 284pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; featuring the Eighth Doctor and "covens of witch-prostitutes," it's set in late 18th-century England; the print is tiny, making this is a very big "Doctor Who" novel, perhaps the longest to date.) *5th November 2001.*

Miller, Walter M. **A Canticle for Leibowitz.** "SF Masterworks, V." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07220-2, 356pp, hardcover, cover by Peter Goodfellow, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1960; not previously issued in the B-format "SF Masterworks" series [presumably because Little Brown/Orbit still hold the paperback rights?], this is one of a set of ten sf classic hardbacks all published by Orion/Gollancz on the same date and numbered in Roman fashion.) *25th October 2001.*

Moorcock, Michael. **Gloriana, or The Unfulfill'd Queen.** "Fantasy Masterworks, 22." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07359-4, 368pp, B-format paperback, cover by Gustave Moreau, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1978; winner of the World Fantasy Award as best novel; this edition follows the "significantly revised" text of 1993.) *18th October 2001.*

Niven, Larry. **Ringworld.** "SF Masterworks, VIII." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07339-X, 288pp, hardcover, cover by Barclay Shaw, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1970; not previously issued in the B-format "SF Masterworks" series [presumably because Little Brown/Orbit still hold the paperback rights?], this is one of a set of ten sf classic hardbacks all published by Orion/Gollancz on the same date and numbered in Roman fashion.) *25th October 2001.*

Phillips, Robert, ed. **Nightshade: 20th Century Ghost Stories.** Robinson, ISBN 1-84119-418-2, xv+464pp, C-format paperback, cover by Ashley Pearce, £9.99. (Ghost-story anthology, first published in the USA, 1999; this is a follow-up to the same editor's *Triumph of the Night* [1989; reissued as *The Omnibus of 20th Century Ghost Stories*]; like the previous volume, it contains reprint stories by mainly "literary" names: Elizabeth Bowen, John Cheever, Isak Dinesen, Ellen Glasgow, L. P. Hartley, James Leo Herlihy, Shirley Jackson, Henry James, Franz Kafka, Alison Lurie, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Joyce Carol Oates, Jean Rhys,

William Trevor, Muriel Spark, Edith Wharton and others; many of the stories are unfamiliar to us, although there are a few old anthology standards included – among them, Max Beer-bohm's "Enoch Soames," F. Marion Crawford's "The Upper Berth" and Rudyard Kipling's "They"; the editor [born 1938] is a main-stream poet, short-story writer and critic and who lives in Texas and has written for prestigious publications like *The New Yorker*; a story of his own, "Wolfie" [1997], is included.) 25th October 2001.

Rankin, Robert. **The Fandom of the Operator.** Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-60256-1, 288pp, hardcover, cover by John Alexander based on a sculpture by the author, £16.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; "a book about death to celebrate a new life," according to the author's dedication; Rankin's novels have now sold over a million copies, his publishers inform us.) 8th November 2001.

Rankin, Robert. **Web Site Story.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14743-5, 381pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Alexander based on a sculpture by the author, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 2001; yet another outing in the loose "Brentford" sequence; Rankin continues to produce his two books a year – but we didn't receive a review copy of the hardcover of this one last spring.) 8th November 2001.

Rice, Anne. **Blood and Gold: The Vampire Marius.** Chatto & Windus, ISBN 0-701-16719-X, 471pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Harrison, £16.99. (Historical horror novel, first published in the USA, 2001; the latest volume in the bestselling "Vampire Chronicles"; this is the first Anne Rice novel we have been sent in some time – the last we saw was *The Vampire Armand* [1998] – but her cult seems to continue as strongly as ever.) 25th October 2001.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. **Blue Mars.** "Voyager Classics." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-712165-2, 789pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1996; the third in Robinson's highly-praised "Mars" trilogy, this is no. 16 in the HarperCollins "Voyager Classics" series; the previous volumes, *Red Mars* and *Green Mars*, were reissued earlier this year as nos. 6 and 12 of the series, although we didn't see them.) 15th October 2001.

Russell, Eric Frank. **Entities: The Selected Novels of Eric Frank Russell.** Edited by Rick Katze. Introductions by Jack L. Chalker. NESFA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701, USA], ISBN 1-886778-33-7, 691pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$29. (Sf omnibus, first edition; it contains the novels *Wasp* [1957], *Sentinels from Space* [1953], *Call Him Dead* [serialized in 1955, later in book form as *Three to Conquer*], *Next of Kin* [1959] and *Sinister Barrier* [1948], plus three shorter stories – "Mana" [1937], "Mechanical Mice" [1941] and "Legwork" [1956] – by the Liver-pudlian author [1905-1978] who was the most "Campbellian" of all sf writers from Britain – i.e. he was a mainstay of John W. Campbell's *Astounding SF* in the 1940s and 1950s, and is

still remembered fondly by some readers for his ingenuity and humour; another worthwhile NESFA volume.) *Late entry: September publication, received in October 2001.*

Russell, Gary. **Instruments of Darkness.** "Doctor Who." BBC, 0-563-53828-7, 287pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; featuring the Sixth Doctor and Mel.) 5th November 2001.

Scott, Martin. **Thraxas and the Sorcerers.** Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-077-6, 266pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Thomas, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; "Martin Scott" is a pseudonym of Martin Millar; this is the fifth in a series of paperback originals, the first three of which – *Thraxas*, *Thraxas and the Warrior Monks* and *Thraxas at the Races* – all came out close together in 1999, with the fourth, *Thraxas and the Elvish Isles*, following in 2000; the first book became the unexpected winner of the World Fantasy Award for best novel, a judges' decision which perplexed many observers.) 1st November 2001.

Siegel, Jan. **The Dragon-Charmer.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-651281-X, 346pp, A-format paperback, cover by the John Howe, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 2000; a follow-up to *Prospero's Children* [1999], set a dozen years later; "Jan Siegel" is a pseudonym of Amanda Hemingway; reviewed by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 169.) 5th November 2001.

Simpson, M. J. **The Pocket Essential Hitchhiker's Guide.** 2nd edition. Foreword by Simon Jones. "Pocket Essentials TV." Pocket Essentials [18 Coleswood Rd., Harpenden, Herts. AL5 1EQ], ISBN 1-903047-40-4, 96pp, A-format paperback, £3.99. (Reading guide to the humorous sf of Douglas Adams; the first edition appeared in April 2001 [shortly before Adams's sudden death]; the author is a former deputy editor of *SFX* magazine, and obviously highly expert when it comes to the subject of Adams's writings and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* in particular; this second edition differs from the first in that a brief "Afterword" has been added on the previously blank page 95.) October 2001.

Sladek, John. **The Complete Roderick.** "SF Masterworks, 45." Gollancz, ISBN 1-85798-340-8, 611pp, B-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £7.99. (Sf omnibus, first published in the UK as *Roderick*, or *The Education of a Young Machine* and *Roderick at Random*, 1980 and 1983; at last! – the two Roderick the Robot satires together in one volume; recommended.) 11th October 2001.

Stableford, Brian. **The Fountains of Youth.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87534-7, 352pp, trade paperback, \$15.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 2000; a considerable expansion of the author's much-praised 1995 novella, "Mortimer Gray's History of Death," it comes with encomia from Michael Bishop, Ian R. MacLeod and others.) 8th October 2001.

Straub, Peter. **Shadowland.** "Voyager Classics." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-711957-7, 478pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Horror novel, first

published in the USA, 1980; this is no. 15 in the dark-blue "Voyager Classics" series.) 15th October 2001.

Tuttle, Lisa. **Writing Fantasy and Science Fiction.** "Writing Handbooks." A. & C. Black, ISBN 0-7136-5853-3, 167pp, B-format paperback, £9.99. ("How-to" book for aspiring writers, first edition; Lisa Tuttle, author of "six novels and three short story collections," joins the long line of sf/fantasy writers who have produced books about how to do it – Christopher Evans, Bob Shaw, Guy N. Smith and Brian Stableford [twice] are some of the others who have written similar volumes in Britain in the last couple of decades; Tuttle's advice seems clear, sensible and up-to-date; recommended.) 31st October 2001.

Vinge, Vernor. **The Collected Stories of Vernor Vinge.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87373-5, 464pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Sf collection, first edition; proof copy received; it contains 17 stories, mostly reprinted from magazines of the 1960s to the 1980s – but the last item, "Fast Times at Fairmont High," is a previously-unpublished, newly-written novella.) December 2001.

Vinge, Vernor, and others. **True Names, and the Opening of the Cyberspace Frontier.** Edited by James Frenkel. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86207-5, 352pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Sf and speculative non-fiction collection, first edition; proof copy received; it contains Vinge's well-known novella "True Names" [1981; his only significant work of shorter fiction not included in the above *Collected Stories of Vernor Vinge*], plus essays by various hands discussing the ideas raised by the author's fiction; contributors include John M. Ford and Marvin Minsky, and the book as a whole is dedicated to Minsky.) December 2001.

Walton, Jo. **The King's Name.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87653-X, 304pp, hardcover, \$26.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the second novel by this writer who lives in Wales, it's a follow-up to *The King's Peace* [2000].) November 2001.

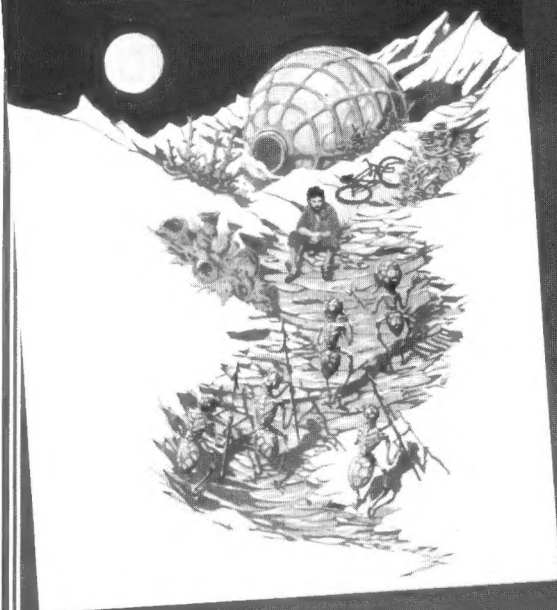
Wolfe, Gene. **There Are Doors.** Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-87230-5, 313pp, trade paperback, cover by Richard Bober, \$14.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 30; about a man who pursues a goddess from an alternate universe, according to Orson Scott Card [quoted on the cover] "it may well be Wolfe's most perfect story.") 15th October 2001.

Wyndham, John. **The Day of the Triffids.** "SF Masterworks, X." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07338-1, 272pp, hardcover, cover by Fred Gambino, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1951; not previously issued in the B-format "SF Masterworks" series [presumably because Penguin Books still hold the paperback rights], this is one of a set of ten sf classic hardbacks all published by Orion/Gollancz on the same date and numbered Roman-style; what a mighty smash-and-grab raid Gollancz have made on other publishers' sf backlists this month!) 25th October 2001.

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